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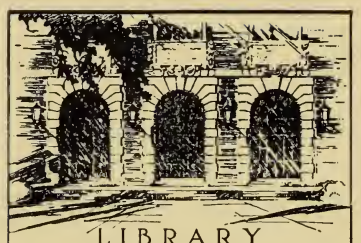
# WISCONSIN WITNESS TO *Frederick Jackson Turner*

## *A Collection of Essays on The Historian and the Thesis*

Compiled by O. Lawrence Burnette, Jr.



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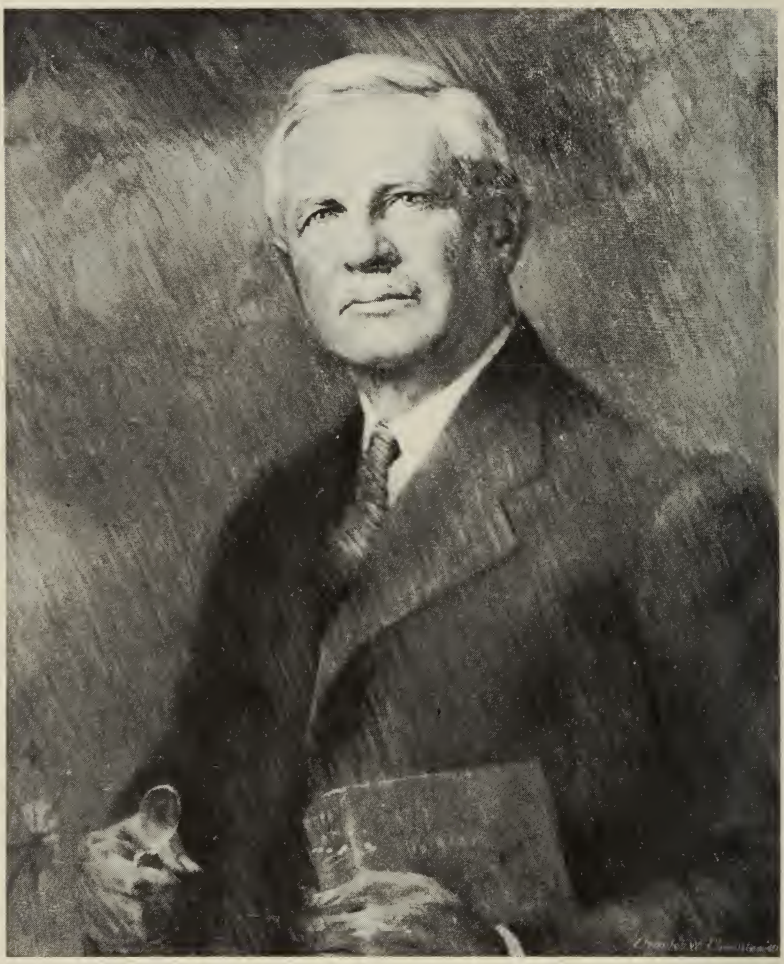
# WISCONSIN WITNESS TO FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER



# WISCONSIN WITNESS

## TO *Frederick Jackson Turner*

*A COLLECTION of ESSAYS on*

*the HISTORIAN and the THESIS*

*Compiled by* O. LAWRENCE BURNETTE, JR.

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN

MADISON 1961

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# Introduction

NEAR the southern limits of the glacier's grinding march down from Canada, where Wisconsin's river makes its wide bend in a last effort to flow East, where Indians and Frenchmen once sought the shortest land bridge between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi, lies Portage. A crossroads of geography and civilization, the sleepy little town with more glory in its past than hope in its future was the cradle of the father of American frontier historiography. Its contribution to America's understanding of itself was Frederick Jackson Turner.

The Turners were Yankees, part of the polyglot flood which poured into Wisconsin in the 1850's. The Germans headed for Milwaukee to raise their German Athens "bei der Michigan Zee," but Andrew Jackson Turner settled in Portage to found his own newspaper, to become active in Republican politics, and to become a functionary in the state government. Exhibiting a literary originality and amateur scholarship beyond that of most country editors, the elder Turner wrote and promoted the history of his frontier community and breathed an awareness of the borders of civilization into his son, born November 14, 1861.

Young Turner had the best schooling his home town and his state university could offer, dabbled in his father's profession for a few months, but ultimately was floated clear of his provincialism by the rising tide of Germanic historical scholarship in the 1880's. No aesthetic scholar, he yet caught the reflections

of the wider horizons of research, and he thirsted after understanding of his nation, his region, himself. The fountain sprang freely at Johns Hopkins, so to the seminar of Herbert B. Adams went Turner, exhilarated by his growing love for a young lady in Madison and his eagerness to refute his master's opinion that American history had been "mined out."

Returning to Madison in the fall of 1889 as the younger colleague of his former teacher, William F. Allen, Turner began that long, distinguished career of teaching and stimulating students upon which his fame would chiefly rest. On friendly soil, and with Reuben Gold Thwaites reaching over his shoulder to call attention to the Draper and other "frontier" materials at the State Historical Society, Turner matured rapidly and became confirmed in his interest in the westward movement. He had sampled this material earlier in his dissertation entitled "The Influence of the Fur Trade in the Development of Wisconsin," which was published by the Society in 1889. Now the general theme was expanded, and the focus shifted from the history of institutions to the development of a philosophy of history.

In the seminars at Hopkins the mature Germanic scholarship had counseled that the American national experience was but an extension of the European germs of its component institutions. Perhaps the civilization of the Atlantic seaboard did so conceive itself, but to the impetuous scholar from beyond the Alleghanies the attempt to explain American democracy by reference to Germanic tribal organization was unnecessarily scholastic. He conceived America as more different than similar to the European precedents, and the difference was the physical geography of America. The speculation on the origins of Turner's fresh but obvious approach to American history is as futile as the rigorous system against which he rebelled. Turner did not "invent" the frontier thesis, nor did he borrow it from Italian economists of land values, nor even did he have a monopoly on the hypothesis. Like the good teacher he was, he

evolved out of his experience and his own times a simple, powerful, and obvious explanation for the pattern of American development and presented it to an unsuspecting generation of historians in 1893. While Turner never claimed that the frontier thesis was the exclusively correct interpretation of the American past, its appeal was so direct that American historiography has never been the same. It has been the subject of acrimonious debate, yet its impact has been felt by historians the world over.

Allen's death just a few months after Turner rejoined him in Madison gave the fledgling professor a moment of insecurity, but he was already well entrenched, and within a few years he was the uncontested leader of his department. His service in building a strong history faculty and reputation for Wisconsin was probably even more significant than the growing band of graduate disciples from his classes, yet despite his obvious success, he felt slighted by the support given him by the University administration. After several false starts, he was finally lured to Harvard in 1910, where his fame and influence grew until his retirement in 1924. After returning briefly to Madison, Turner spent his last years in the Golden West as a research associate at the Huntington Library, and as an elder statesman of history watched his thesis laid down thirty years before become historiographical doctrine, yet always with dissenters.

Turner's removal to Harvard stung the pride of the academic community in Madison, and as his national stature grew, Wisconsin strove all the more to reappropriate him by origin if not in person. Under the superintendency of Joseph Schafer, the State Historical Society, and its *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* became a special vehicle for the publication of material on or about the state's most illustrious historian. Schafer, himself, in a series of articles and editorials set the pattern of Wisconsin's apology for Turner, and these articles, some of which are out of print, still have freshness and bearing upon the contemporary re-evaluation of Turner in this centennial year of his birth.

One of the earliest reviews of the global application of the Turner thesis was that of Carl Russell Fish, published in 1917 in the first volume of the *Magazine of History.* "The Frontier, A World Problem" still states the case effectively, and has piqued the imagination of scholars from the frontiers of Western Canada to Eastern Siberia.

A systematic analysis of the frontier thesis and an apology for its utility was contributed by Schafer in 1933, shortly after Turner's death. "Turner's Frontier Philosophy" is perceptive and well written, stressing the role of the frontier in holding the diverging sections together as long as it did. A later contribution by Schafer, "Some Facts Bearing on the Safety-Valve Theory," will be remembered as the fuse which ignited a sharp exchange of opinion, which Turner himself would probably have tremendously enjoyed.

Intellectual ideas of any consequence usually have political consequences, and such a basic one as the frontier hypothesis of history must inevitably have been appropriated by American politics. Curtis Nettels' "Frederick Jackson Turner and the New Deal" is a highly illuminating examination of the significance of the conscious extinction of the old frontier upon the economic planning of the New Deal. It is also strongly suggestive of the contemporary effort of a later administration in finding the economic equivalent of the old frontier.

One of the most charming and revealing insights into the warmly human but retiring personality of Turner is "Turner's Autobiographic Letter," written to Constance Lindsay Skinner and edited by Schafer when published in 1935. Miss Skinner's illustrious correspondent had, in 1922, cheerfully responded to her request for some personal, autobiographical information, but self-effacingly added the postscript, "Of course this is for your personal information and not for publication. Don't smile, please —"

The paucity of Turner's published work has placed great

value upon what he did write, and the search for the intellectual origins of the thesis has given a premium to the earliest of his writing, pre-dating 1893. In 1940, Fulmer Mood contributed to the *Magazine* a collection of "Little Known Fragments of Turner's Writing," principally the brief and closely organized sketch on Wisconsin's history which he wrote for the 1888 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica.* More a model of compact and effective prose than a key to the frontier thesis, it deserves to be studied by historians.

By the tenth anniversary of Turner's death in 1942 his shadow had so lengthened that an objective appraisal of "Frederick Jackson Turner, Historian" could be undertaken by Avery Craven, one of his many illustrious students. Read before the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, the appraisal is still valid, for it was well conceived with a love and knowledge of the man and an understanding of the evolutionary force in historiography.

A more speculative and provocative interpretation of Turner and the thesis was provided by George Wilson Pierson in a two-part article on "American Historians and the Frontier Hypothesis in 1941." Incorporating the results of an opinion questionnaire circulated among American historians, Professor Pierson concluded, at times with tongue in cheek, the general truth that in a free exchange of ideas, bold ones generate the whole range of agreement and dissent. A more sober review of the critics of Turner is provided by J. A. Burkhart in "The Turner Thesis: A Historian's Controversy" published in the *Magazine* in 1947.

Until the appearance of one of the promised full-length biographies of Turner, one of the best and most recent summary evaluations of him was the sketch by Merle E. Curti presented to, and published in 1949 by, the Commission of History of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (Mexico City). In the belief that this biographical analysis of Turner and his thought by one of his most noted students (and a Wiscon-

sin resident) deserves wider circulation in the United States, it is reprinted as the concluding article. The permission of the publisher to reprint this material is gratefully acknowledged, with expressions of hope for closer cultural ties between the historians of the Americas.

The articles here collected by no means exhaust the storehouse from which they were drawn, for these are but a representative sample of others of similar nature and merit. The material has been reprinted by a photo-lithographic process, reproducing exactly standing pages of type, and no effort was made to eliminate minor inconsistencies in page formats.

The co-operation of many colleagues was enjoyed in drawing together this material principally from the back volumes of the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* and in presenting it as a Wisconsin Witness to Turner. I am particularly indebted to the editor of the *Magazine,* William Converse Haygood, who gladly sacrificed the last remaining file copies of certain issues as seed corn that the material be made more widely available for another day. Such was the spirit of the frontier.

O. L. B., Jr.

*The State Historical Society of Wisconsin*
*Spring, 1961*

# WISCONSIN WITNESS TO FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER

# THE FRONTIER A WORLD PROBLEM[1]

By Carl Russell Fish

Only by a study of local history can we hope really to understand the development of human society. The historian like the scientist must base his knowledge on what can be seen through a microscope. Wisconsin, from the time of its formation as a state, has realized this, and has steadily confirmed itself in the opinion. This institution, which it founded in the days of its youth and scant resources, it has supported with a liberality, public and private, growing as its wealth has grown. Of late years, a corps of local societies, city and county, have been forming about the central institution. The University has directed its students to the study of the localities from which they have come, and stores in its stacks the facts which they glean. No one of the newer states of the country knows itself so well as Wisconsin, and if, as is so often the case, acquired knowledge seems merely to reveal the knowledge still necessary for real understanding, we have carefully developed plans to extend it still more widely and intensively.

Yet how insignificant any locality seems today, when practically all are plunged into the same calamity, when the resources of all are concentrated in one struggle. Races and breeds, nationalities and castes are merged together on the same battle-field. Their similarities of plight and object dominate their differences, the protective barriers each erected to preserve that distinctiveness so dear to human nature seem leveled, and history has become world history. Men thrown thus physically into the maelstrom find themselves intellectually also torn from their safe anchorages and adrift they know not where. What does the individual count for, what

[1] Delivered as the annual address before the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, October 25, 1917.

the locality, what the past? What counts it to study the development of Rock County cheese-making, when its cheeses and cheese makers are tumbled promiscuously with those of all counties and nations, simply as units in a staggering sum total?

The world has changed, but that is not startling. The world is always changing. This change is greater, and for us in America more sudden and dramatic, than any which preceded, but everything has not changed. The relation of the past to the present and the future is permanent. The relations of the individual, the locality, and the whole, shift, but they are the permanent factors of which life consists. The world war has not changed these factors, but it should bring us up sharply to a realization of what they really mean. Socrates' dictum "know thyself" was not given in any selfish spirit. He did not mean that we were to devote ourselves to ourselves, but that we could know ourselves more thoroughly than we could know others, that self-knowledge was the completest knowledge, and therefore the Archimedian lever to open up knowledge of others. Self-examination has often become an obsession excluding all else, the study of local history has often become antiquarianism. The real reason for the cultivating of both is the formation of known bases from which to calculate. The German historian, Lamprecht, became so familiar with the little city of Trêves that he could have conversed intimately with its inhabitants of any year during the Middle Ages if he might have been dropped into it, but this devotion was not for the sake of Trêves, it gave the understanding knowledge necessary for his great work on German civilization as a whole. We can know no generation unless we have delved deep into the souls of its greatest men, but such biographical studies are not for themselves alone, but to contribute to a sympathetic comprehension of their contemporaries.

Local history to justify itself must be as exact and absolute as studies dealing with human nature may be, but if no effort is made to utilize it for an understanding of national and world history, it has missed its mission. Local history is not an end in itself. Moreover, if it is written without a wide knowledge of outside conditions, conditions in other localities, and other times, it will be but a warped product, as useless to the community for which it is written as for the outside world. Such selfishness and egoism have never been profitable. The only difference today is that for the moment at least they have become impossible.

The most striking feature in the history of Wisconsin has been the transformation within a lifetime of a virgin forest into a civilized area, the drawing together of the sons and daughters of many widely differing localities and their welding into a commonwealth. This conquest of the frontier has been but a portion of that vast movement which in a period historically short has created the United States, and more particularly it has been an important and typical battle in the campaign for the Mississippi Valley, which has resulted in our sister states of the Middle West.

Different as has been the history of each, the history of the frontier movement is a whole; the study of any state contributes to an understanding of all. As the occupation of Wisconsin has been but a part of the American frontier movement, so that has not been unique, even in the nineteenth century. We have liked to think of ourselves as carrying on a special and distinct task; to its difficulties and inspiration we have attributed many of our virtues, and on them we have laid the burden of our defects. The task, however, has not been unique. The results have, indeed, had their distinctive differences, but these have come rather from the way the task has been performed than because we have had a different thing to do. We know our own frontier with scientific thoroughness, but we cannot understand it unless we contrast

it with such other frontiers as Australia, Siberia, South America, and Africa.

One of the essential features of a frontier is that both labor and capital come from without, and much of the capital is contributed by people who do not come to the frontier. Exception must, indeed, be made to this statement. The Spaniards found labor in Peru and Mexico, and they found also capital, as did the miners of Australia and California, the lumber barons of Wisconsin, and the fur traders of Canada. In none of these instances, however, did either the local labor or local capital suffice, and in all the instances to be cited later the bulk of the labor came from away, and the owners of an important portion of the capital remained away; the frontier community, therefore, was a debtor community, and the debt was due to an outside community.

This common condition has in all cases had an important bearing not only on economic development, but on the whole texture of the social fabric which was created; it affected not only the frontier itself, but its reflex influence on the sections from which the labor and capital were drawn set at work influences which at times became leading factors in their existence. So important have their influences been, that where the study is confined to any one frontier, they seem to dominate development, and make history their creature. When we extend our study, however, we find that in spite of the fundamental resemblance, each has followed its separate course; that the different balance of other factors, and even such secondary considerations as laws and constitutions, have radically altered the actual operation of these powerful natural resemblances. The control of the frontier's natural resources, the distribution of proceeds, the very content of politics have varied with every frontier. The problem has been one, the methods and results have been as varied as the fields in which it occurred.

In the United States the larger part of the capital came from or through another section of the same country. That is, the East furnished nearly all that was supplied, although to do so it had to borrow somewhat from Europe. The direct loans from Europe to the West were comparatively unimportant. Consequently the interests of the debtor and creditor sections conflicted in the arena of national politics. Two unique features made the working out of the problem different in this country from any other. The first was the division of the country into a large number of states, sovereign within a restricted range of powers, some controlled by the debtor element, some by the creditor. The other was that at one time, and that the most critical, the frontier was strong enough at least to veto the action of the national government.

The result of these conditions was a struggle unusually complex. The control of banking, of the currency, of natural resources, such as lands, minerals, and oil, and of transportation or, as it is phrased in our politics, internal improvements, were the bone of contention. The desire to have these controlled by national or state governments varied with the political situation. The frontier wished banks that would not be too particular, a currency that would be easy to get; it wished, and wishes, control of its own systems of transportation and its natural resources.

The sections furnishing the supplies were more interested in the capital to which strings were tied, than in the labor which cut its apron strings on leaving home. The struggle antedated the Revolution; the high points in its later history were the Shays Rebellion, the Jackson régime, the greenback movement, the Bryan campaign, and it finds present expression in the opposition in the Far West to the national conservation policy.

When the frontier secured the reins of power in the sinewy hands of Andrew Jackson, it was not in a position to impose its policy upon the nation, but it was powerful enough to wrest

banking, the currency, and internal improvements from the control of the national government, and turn them over to the states. The frontier states, elate, started on a mad career of making their own internal improvements, by means of borrowed capital diluted by paper issues, till money ran like fairy gold into the pockets of the needy. For one golden moment the problem of the frontier seemed solved to the satisfaction of the frontier. Jackson himself caused the first crash. Unable to tell good paper from bad, he could at any rate tell paper from gold, and in the Specie Circular of 1836 he brought credit to the touchstone of real value and sent the house of cards toppling. Feverishly rebuilt within the next few years, it fell again in 1841, carrying with it the whole dream of its builders. So severe was the blow that numbers of the states took advantage of their sovereign rights, and repudiated a portion of their debts. Securely entrenched behind their sovereign inviolability to legal attack, they still enjoyed the inviolability to force which their position as part of a larger nation afforded. They snapped their fingers at their creditors; but they could borrow no more. The nation had left the task of national development to the states; the states, by impairing their credit, had rendered themselves incapable of handling it.

This situation left the field free for, in fact rendered necessary, the intervention of individuals or of individuals organized as corporations. The legal position of the latter had already been prepared. The decisions of Justice Marshall had given corporation charters an unusual degree of legal sanctity, which the state constitutions modified rather than reversed. The fears of the Jeffersonian democracy had incorporated into the national constitution itself special restrictions upon the government in dealing with the individual, which the decisions of the Supreme Court under Justice Taney went far in applying to the corporations. Corporations became so firmly entrenched in their position

as the chief agency in national development, that even when, after the Civil War, the national government became more active and once more assumed control of banking and the currency, and the credit of the states was reëstablished, both agencies used their powers chiefly to assist corporations. When, in the present generation, the necessity of public control became obvious, it took the form, for the most part, of regulation of corporations, rather than that of absorbing or supplanting them.

The direction of the development of transportation and the exploitation of natural resources, therefore, was, for the most part, in the hands of individuals, and, in the case of large projects, of individuals organized as corporations, and, with the exception of farm land, of individuals and corporations representing nonresident capital. Many influences, of course, modified their activities, but these affected rather the security of their capital than the initiative of their plans. Many lost the capital which they poured into the new region, and the result was that the prospect of large returns was demanded by others before venturing; speculation, lost investments, and abnormally productive investments characterized the process as a whole. Politicians concerned themselves rather with the means, the questions of banking and currency, than with the end, the character of the development which should take place.

The other independent portions of the American continents, for the most part, resembled the United States in organization, but the distribution of the economic factors differed and produced different results. Except in the United States, the capital which has been necessary for the occupation of the wilderness has come, for the most part, not from other portions of the same country, but from foreign countries.

The most important of these frontiers during the nineteenth century has been that of Argentina. Here the established section was until recently comparatively unimportant,

both labor and capital came in large measure from abroad; the greater portion of the labor from Italy, of the capital from Great Britain. The conflict between the debtor and creditor sections, therefore, was not one of politics, but of diplomacy. Argentina might have what system of banking and currency it wished, but most creditors had to be paid in an international standard of value. In a world state, doubtless, all the frontiers would unite to further their interests, as the frontier states have in the United States; in the world as at present unorganized the ultimate appeal is to force. A debtor country, and one relatively weak as compared with its creditor, Argentina has not been without its plans, conceived like those of the American frontiersman without moral dishonesty but with incapacity or unwillingness to think the thing through, for easing its burden. In the efforts of Calvo and Drago to incorporate into international law the principle that debts between nations and their citizens may not be collected by force, we see as surely the reflection of frontier views, as in the programs of Greenbacker and of Populist. In the greater interest in international affairs in Argentina than in the United States, we see a new illustration of the aphorism "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

In the long run, Argentina has had to pay up, and has had to pay also in high interest rates, for the lack of a feeling of absolute security on the part of the investor. Probably few countries have had more expensive statesmen than Drago and Calvo.

To attract capital, moreover, it has been necessary to offer it abundantly the undeveloped natural resources of the country. On the other hand, the logic of the situation has kept development in the hands of the nation to a greater degree than in the United States, for the nation has been able to borrow money more cheaply than individuals or domestic corporations, and public ownership has played an important part in her upbuilding.

Argentina has paid, and so we have a situation which has never culminated in a crisis. The republics of the Caribbean have not been so fortunate. Much of the money has been borrowed, not for the purposes of improvement, but to finance revolution and for personal expenditure. Frittered away instead of put at productive work, it has become an increasing burden, in many cases an unbearable burden, and countries like Hayti, San Domingo, Honduras, and at times Mexico, have become internationally bankrupt. Protected against legal action by their sovereignty, the creditor and the debtor stood in a situation where force alone could determine their relationship. What the result would normally have been, is clearly enough indicated by the intervention of France in Mexico in 1861, and of Germany in Venezuela in 1902. The subjugation of the weak debtor by the strong creditor has been prevented not by sovereignty, but by the interposition of a third force, the United States inspired by the Monroe Doctrine.

While, however, the Monroe Doctrine served to maintain the appearance of independence for the nations concerned, it produced an *impasse* in the development of the frontier. Capital did not have to go to countries which could not be relied upon to pay up and which were protected from foreclosure by an outside force. The United States served the republics in somewhat the same manner that it did its own repudiating states. It was, however, unable to do as much for them as it did for its own. The wayward republics found themselves debarred from directing their own development as did our states in the critical forties, and there was no domestic capital to undertake the task. The capital willing to engage in work under such circumstances was that of the most speculative sort. Some gamblers staked their money on presidential contenders, seeking to gain control of the government. Others, more powerful and trusting in their power, offered to embark huge sums on condition of receiv-

ing stupendous grants of the natural resources and practical control of the whole development to be made in certain regions. Such was the much-discussed Morgan syndicate proposal to Honduras, and that of the English Pearson syndicate to Columbia. In the latter instance, the United States again intervened, fearing the influence of such aggregations of foreign capital, and expressed its opinion that such special concessions violated the spirit of the Monroe Doctrine and could not be allowed.

From the tightening deadlock thus produced, Diaz extricated Mexico for a time, but it lapsed, and the others showed no signs of the power to emerge. Such European capital as had been loaned felt not unjustly angry, such as was for hire sought other avenues and frontiers less peculiarly hedged in. The situation shouted for action, and action could come only from the United States, which would not permit simple logic to work its own conclusion. It was under such circumstances that President Roosevelt assumed the financial administration of San Domingo and inaugurated a policy which has been followed and extended by his successors. Justice, or approximate justice, has been done between debtor and creditor, but the active development of these frontiers is still halted for lack of a machinery for the future.

In striking contrast with these American frontiers has been that of Siberia. Here has taken place one of the greatest frontier advances of history, here the same localization of creditor and debtor has existed, yet the conflict of classes and sections has led neither to politics as in the United States, nor to diplomacy as in Latin America. Much of the capital has been provided by France, but the money has, for the most part, been borrowed by the national Russian government, representing a strong nation and an essential ally. The security of the creditor has rested in the good faith, not of the frontier but of an established society, which has wished

constantly more and more money and has realized that an atmosphere of credit must be preserved.

As the frontier has had nothing to say concerning its credit relationships, so it has been equally powerless in controlling the expenditures of the money borrowed and the disposition of its natural resources. The sole check upon the absolute will of the central government has been the desire to attract labor to the frontier. Few laborers, as few capitalists, seek the wild for the mere adventure of subduing it. The bids and rival bids for settlers by those controlling various sections of the world-frontier for the last three centuries have been to a large extent the basis for those more liberal institutions which have developed on the fringe of society. Their bids have been determined by the character of the settlers they desired or found available, and have in considerable measure determined the character of the communities built up. Force has played its part as well as lure, and has given incurious Africa a share in the development of the Americas that the most psychological advertiser would never have secured for it. In the nineteenth century, Russia has had more command of force to populate her waste spaces than any other country. Consequently the actual frontiersmen have had less to say about the development of their own region than elsewhere. Yet it is easily possible to exaggerate the coercive power of the central government, in popular estimation it is probably exaggerated; and the plans for the settlement of Siberia have been to no small degree influenced by consideration for the ideals of the typical Russian and the incentives which would coerce him to move his hearthstone. Yet on the whole, simplicity and the carrying out of preconceived plans have worked the opening of this great frontier. That the great release which has just occurred in Russia will reveal where these plans have bound, and that the politics of the new republic will be colored by frontier problems, is inevitable.

Australia and New Zealand have, to an even greater extent than the American frontier, secured their labor and capital from another section of the same empire. The relations between the sections, however, are quite different. The local organization of the debtor communities resembles that of the American states; in fact, the scope of their power is much broader, but they do not possess that inviolability to legal attack which sovereignty gives, and have not been represented in the central government. Credit, therefore, has been a matter of neither politics nor diplomacy, but has been as firmly controlled by the lending section, England, as that of Siberia has been by Russia. Judicial unity, which has been the only organic bond of empire, makes the sovereign, like the Crown, identical in Brisbane and in London. There is no chance of reducing debts save by a separation, which other considerations have rendered furthest from the wishes of the debtors.

General diplomacy also has been largely excluded from local consideration. The creditor-debtor relationship was almost exclusively one within the empire, and the handling of other diplomatic questions was in the hands of the British government in which the frontier sections were represented only by influence. The attempts to arouse an imperial, not to say international, mind found hard sledging during the real development period, and only partially succeeded just before the Great War.

On the other hand, the locality has been absolute master of the expenditure of its borrowings. No subordinate communities in the world, most decidedly not the states of our Union, have been left so entirely free to control their development, not only to plan their transportation and allot their natural resources, but even to regulate their tariffs. It is not surprising that these governments, with credit carefully maintained by outside and unquestionable forces, found their politics in the working out of such development, and that,

in large measure, borrowing has been done by the local governments, which have themselves spent the money borrowed. There can be no better security than that of a government incapacitated from repudiation. Creditors have lost comparatively little money to these frontiers, and so Australia and New Zealand have received their needed capital upon better terms, perhaps, than any of the other regions treated. How wisely they have spent it, is a matter of the most violent dispute.

Politics in communities barred from the great questions of credit and diplomacy yet organized on the basis of the broadest democracy and local autonomy, have naturally had their strikingly significant characteristics. Everyone knows how rich their statute books have been in laws relating to the distribution of natural resources and of all kinds of wealth, and to conditions of living. Everyone knows the sharp antagonism between labor, in the narrower sense of wage earner, and employers. That these frontiers have been experiment grounds in social legislation has not been due to their being frontier communities but because they have been frontier communities freed from some of the most characteristic frontier problems.

Rhodesia resembles Australia and New Zealand in local autonomy and lack of representation in the national government. In other respects, however, it is widely different. Here capital came first, and labor afterward. The capital, moreover, was not of the timid sort seeking small return and security, such as invested in the securities of New Zealand, Victoria, and New South Wales, nor did it entirely resemble that of the United States during the development period, which sought returns both large and immediate. The capitalists of Rhodesia could wait, in fact, are still waiting. Alone among the frontiers, Rhodesia has not been under the strain of seeking to make returns on its invested capital before development has reached the stage where returns can

properly be expected. It may well hope to be freed from those complications of individual indebtedness, which have filled our courts with business, and strewn our advance with such tragedies as are even today occurring in northern Wisconsin.

Upon the capitalists thus far-sighted and enduring rested the full burden of development. The region was antonomous in its relation to the British Empire, but its non-resident creditors mapped out its future, not its settlers as in Australia. Capital under such circumstances looks for large rewards, and in this case expects to secure them by control of the natural resources, when these have been made available by the incoming of settlers. Youngest of the frontiers, the working of the old factors in this new relationship remains a question. One would expect economy and efficiency in planning, but possible conflicts between the resident community and its creditors over the division of the proceeds. The settlers that it seeks are of the most independent type, men not with energy alone, but with some small capital of their own. It offers them not only economic opportunity but also political privileges. How such a population will react under a system which restricts politics one degree more than they are restricted in Australia, by excluding the larger lines of local development such as transportation, is one of the interesting questions of tomorrow. One might look for some clue in the history of the American colonial proprietorships, but how far the intelligent study of those experiments will have enabled the proprietors of Rhodesia to avoid their mistakes, and how far the changed conditions created by two centuries of the most rapid change the world has seen, will modify the interworking of similar forces, no one can tell.

In organization, Canada is today, of course, like Australia, but whereas the commonwealth of Australia is but recent and was formed only after the scaffolding of development had been created, the Dominion of Canada was created

in season to direct the most active period of frontiering. During the most significant period, therefore, Canada has had an organization that resembled our federal states. The resemblance, however, is partly superficial; in Canada the specified powers belong to the provinces, the undefined powers to the Dominion. Neither provinces nor Dominion, moreover, have possessed the legal inviolability of absolute sovereignty. The credit of all has been protected by the judicial unity of the empire, and the stability of the currency has not been a subject for politics. Diplomacy, also, has belonged to the mother country, although the proximity of the United States has not allowed it to be the blank it was so long in its Australian sister-colonies.

Economically the development of the Canadian frontier has more resembled that of the United States, for the capital required has come most largely from or through other sections of the same colony. As compared with the United States, however, development has been, until quite lately, slow. Consequently those regions which have passed beyond the frontier stage have continuously controlled the central government. There has been no parallel to the Jackson régime. Credit, therefore, has been doubly guarded, by the majority in Canada, and by Canada's position within the British Empire. With the credit of the Dominion and of the provinces intact, there have been no intrinsic obstacles to the development of transportation and the control of resources by the public, and public works have played an important part. At the same time the period of greatest need coincided with the high tide of the individualistic movement in the Anglo-Saxon world. The principles of John Stuart Mill, of Cobbett and Bright, of Gladstone, Carlyle, and Emerson, dominated a generation devoted to the task of breaking down time-worn systems of social control and releasing the individual. The period of new regulations dictated by rising democracy had not swung in. Therefore, a very considerable portion of the

task was left to private corporations, to whom were granted very considerable proportions of the natural resources. Corporation control and public enterprise, therefore, combined with unusual harmony in developing and exploiting a frontier which was, indeed, represented, but which could control in neither a positive nor a negative sense.

The recent and sudden expansion of the Canadian frontier in the west and northwest has created a new balance. The situation in Canada today resembles that in the United States when the advance of population from the Alleghanies to beyond the Mississippi gave the frontier an unusual political weight, and elected Andrew Jackson. This region is just now in the position where it is so eager to get capital that it is ready to agree to almost any terms to secure its railroads and farm machinery. When pay time comes, its sentiments will change. It is difficult to see how it can upset credit, but that, in combination with the democracy of the older portions of Canada, it will make its voice felt and play a part in Canadian politics that the frontier has never played in the long course of Canadian history, no student of frontiers can doubt.

On the whole, Canada has secured its capital at low interest rates, lower probably than any other frontier except Australia and New Zealand. It has, however, sacrificed the control of its natural resources to a considerable degree. The direction of its development has attracted both public attention and the labor of its strongest men controlling private capital. In none of the frontiers have the two systems been so equally blended.

Most hapless of the frontiers is that of Manchuria. It is at present a represented province of an imperial republic, which furnishes most of the labor required, but can furnish neither capital nor protection. Its capital comes, for the most part, from two rival foreign powers, who are not really creditor nations, but who are so eager to invest in Manchuria that they borrow from still other countries for the purpose. The

local community has no more to say in regard to its development or the partition of its resources than Siberia. It does not, indeed, rest under any such obligation of paying as does Australia, for power rather than money return is sought by Russia and Japan, who furnish it with money on their own security and, therefore, at reasonably low rates. Undoubtedly, however, the successful grasp of power will mean such a hold on natural resources as will give those countries, in return for their guarantee, rewards which will be more satisfactory to them than to the actual conquerors of the Manchurian wilds. It will be interesting to see whether sectional interests will unite the Russian and Japanese settlers with the Chinese majority against the foreign capitalists, or whether racial antagonism will prove stronger than economic. Countless cross currents already chop the surface, and conditions point rather to a problem than a state.

Wide as is the field covered by the frontiers discussed, the Mississippi Valley, Argentina, the wilds encircling the Caribbean, Siberia, Australia, Canada, and Manchuria, it covers barely half the area where since the year 1800 European civilization has been struggling to establish itself by the occupation of regions wholly or partly vacant. Different as have been the conditions classified under which the simple underlying factors universally involved have operated, more have been left undescribed. Algiers has had a frontier incorporated as an integral part of France, a centralized republic. In fact, practically every region of Africa has presented a frontier, and the handling of frontier conditions by English, French, and Belgians, Boers, Germans, Portuguese, Italians, Spaniards, and American negroes. The greatest frontier area today is Brazil, and every country of Latin America has a frontier and its own slightly varying organization and balance of forces, while the British, French, and Dutch are all severally trying their hand on the particular problem of a tropical American frontier. Some portions of India, Persia,

Arabia, Indo-China, China, Korea, the Philippines, Formosa, and many South Sea Islands, present the problem under special guises. Sweden, Norway, Russia, Canada, and the United States are all dealing with the possibility of pressing civilization into the fastnesses of the Arctic.

When one considers the extent of the world frontier in process of occupation during the last century, the persuasive effect of its call upon the older world for labor and capital, the coloring of the whole world by the natural resources it has unearthed and the institutions it has developed, its conquest can hardly be considered as second in influence to any factor of the time. Naturally it is not intended to present here even a basis for its study. The fundamental factors and the different systems can be accurately enough described in general terms, but the differences in their operation are less precise than has been indicated; private corporations exist in Siberia, state public improvements in the United States. Many of the similarities produced everywhere by frontier conditions have been neglected. The attempt has been merely to indicate some of the tendencies fostered by different types of control. The differences between the various frontiers, resulting from race and geography, which in many cases explain the different types of organization or modify their working, have been left untouched. The problem is immense, its study is one for generations. Yet some things he who runs may read. Even a partial acquaintance with the main features of all cannot but render the work of each statesman and historian more effective in his own particular task.

Some things will be understood only when no frontier, as we know it, exists. Yet even while we are in the current, we have accumulated some material, and it would seem to be contributory negligence not to use it. It must be patent that one must be honest or must pay for it. Can we not secure some rough idea of which system of approach has resulted in the greater justice between the creditor and debtor section,

and what is justice? Has community control of its development or creditor control been most economical and most effective? Has exploitation to produce local capital any justification? What system has called to the task the greater proportion of ability? Would the United States have fared better under a system by which Webster, Clay, and Calhoun would have devoted to moulding the transportation system the genius they spent in bolstering up public credit? Which system has been the most responsive to the needs of the situation, and which has stimulated the greatest amount of public virtue, and which has been most easily manipulated for selfish advantage?

I haven't the slightest intention of answering these questions here; I freely admit that many of them leave me perplexed, but I dogmatically maintain that it is by pondering such questions, by studying the comparisons they suggest, that the frontier problem is to be understood by the historian and comprehended by the statesman. Without such comparisons the student of the problem in any one field is less apt to judge a particular episode rightly than a man with no knowledge and good intentions. The path to wisdom and sure-footed action must be founded on the rock of exact knowledge, but it must be platted on a wide-spread survey.

All life reveals the irony of wisdom attained only by the experience to deal with which it was needed. It is but today we have this rich storehouse of experimental frontier building, and tomorrow we will have no frontier. It might seem that we could let a dead past bury its dead, that the study of frontier episodes, however successful, has become sheer antiquarianism. Such a view, however, minimizes the world frontier that remains and the time and effort that will be required in its conquest. As in science, so with the material world, the nineteenth century made easy sweeping advances; it left much that was difficult for the slower and more laborious labors of the twentieth. It overlooks the facts that great masses of the world's inhabitants today count the experi-

ence of meeting the wild first-hand among the most important of their nearby inheritances, that the frontier set its mark upon them or their parents, or grandparents, and that the present generation cannot be understood unless the frontier is understood. Still more important is the consideration that in many instances the frontier merely localizes problems that are general. The factors with which this paper has dealt are peculiar to the frontier only in that the creditors are assembled in one section, the debtors in another. This is an important peculiarity in large part because it isolates the characteristics of each, and makes them easier of study. When the world has been fully occupied, new frontiers will appear, are already appearing. Natural resources now undreamed of will need capital and labor for their exploitation, will be susceptible of development in more than one way, and will raise problems of control. Our experiences with the rude and simple problem of the first occupation of a waste area will seem as geometry to calculus compared with those raised by these new frontiers, but will be as essential to a wise handling of them as geometry is to calculus.

But the instances that we have reviewed seem to carry a simpler and more immediate moral. When we see in the United States people of all nations laboring for the conquest of the Mississippi Valley, and employing money saved by New England and the Middle States or borrowed by them from Europe, when we see Russia borrowing French money to make Siberia habitable for Russian peasants, when Japan borrows in England, and Russia in France to pay Chinese to develop transportation in Manchuria, when Argentina borrows English money to employ Italians in the pampas, and Transvaal gold passes through English banks to build Rhodesian railways, we get glimpses of a new world. Not that these things are absolutely novel, but that in variety and extent they are unparalleled, and these experiences on the frontiers but bring into clearer view general tendencies of the time. The German invasion of Belgium uncovered for

most of us the tens of thousands of Russians working in the Liege factories, the hundreds of thousands of Russians working on German farms, of Italians on the Rhine, of Spaniards in France; the war itself has hastened the movement with its vast importations of Indo-Chinese and Arabs into France, with its tight-woven mesh of international credit. The frontier still reveals most clearly how in the nineteenth century the business of life became international and how poorly devised was the world organization for coping with it.

Again, the experience of the frontier in the nineteenth century exhibits one step in the process of readjustment. Can one review the instances which have been noted, without feeling the theory of absolute sovereignty crumbling beneath his feet? The United States has in practice divided the sovereignty, and as a result surrendered the actual control to corporations they themselves created. The British Empire preserved unity in theory, but actually divided it still more effectually. What can a practical man make of the sovereignty of Honduras, where the native government cannot control its own development, the British Empire cannot protect its citizens' money, and the United States can veto the actions of both but cannot take positive action; or of Manchuria, which is an integral portion of a sovereign republic, but which is actually as to one-half controlled by Russia and the other by Japan, both of whom are somewhat curtailed in their actions by promises to the United States. However one may cling to the legal theory of the absolute and indivisible character of sovereignty in independent localities, a study of the world frontier brings out the fact that no localities are independent in fact, or absolutely sovereign. The intergrowth of the world, which the development of the world frontier has so much facilitated, has already weakened the bulwarks of local independence; let us hope that with its international character the frontier may facilitate the integration of a world organization better adapted to the conditions of today, such an organization as tomorrow will be a necessity.

# TURNER'S FRONTIER PHILOSOPHY

*By* Joseph Schafer

"And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history."

In these words the thirty-two year old professor, Frederick Jackson Turner, of the University of Wisconsin, concluded his address on *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* before the American Historical Association at its Chicago World's Fair meeting, July 12, 1893. On December 14 of that year he read the same paper before the State Historical Society of Wisconsin at Madison. In this form it was printed, making a pamphlet of thirty-three pages, charged with that historical philosophy which his successors are now discussing as the chief contribution of the past generation to the strictly thought content of American historiography.

Scores and hundreds have been writing history meantime, as the groaning shelves of our libraries attest. There have been big books, little books, series of volumes by prolific individual authors, huge coöperatively produced sets, and doctoral theses. In addition, thousands of volumes of "sources," many of them carefully edited, with elaborate introductions, have been provided to toll the timid devotee into the penetralia of our great subject. Yet we emerge from "The generation of the Frontier Hypothesis" into a world, as far removed in character from that of 1893 as Grover Cleveland

was separated from Andrew Jackson, not only proclaiming the continued validity of Turner's historical interpretation, but confessing our inability thus far either to supplement it fundamentally, or to weaken it by criticism.

"After a generation of general currency," says Professor Paxson, "the Turner hypothesis stands today as easily to be accepted as it was when launched. It was modest and reasonable when it gave new meaning to American history. When it is used as its framer framed it, it is as useful a guide as it ever was. The advance of historical scholarship since 1893 has brought to light an abundance of facts that Turner never saw. But speaking by the large these facts either fit comfortably into the matrix he prepared for them, or they carry on the analysis farther than he pushed it. In so few cases do they appear to contradict him that we are entitled to suppose that those who distrusted his soundness were never able to find the facts to warrant their distrust; and we may perhaps account for the weakness of the straggling attacks upon his hypothesis by the inherent weakness of the case against it."[1]

The above, coming from one of the most gifted, independent, and critical of Turner's continuators, is the highest testimony that can be adduced in favor of the tenableness of that body of doctrine which almost the entire historical fraternity came promptly to accept, with gladness, as the fruit of Turner's penetrative genius.

What, then, is the frontier hypothesis? Although frequently republished, it may still be true that even the present generation of lay historical readers lacks a comprehensive view of what that provocative pamphlet of forty years ago actually contained, and just why it revivified the subject of American history.

[1] F. L. Paxson, "A Generation of the Frontier Hypothesis," *Pacific Historical Review*, March, 1933, ii, 34-51.

To characterize in a word the older historiography, it was descriptive, emotional, hortatory, and pragmatic or pedagogical. George Tucker wished to show that our nation's course had been "pacific, liberal, and just" toward its neighbors; that "political dissentions" were apt to have consequences; that public welfare is sometimes lost sight of in the heat of party struggles; that "small immediate gains" had been "suffered to prevail against great permanent advantages."[2]

George Bancroft, "impressed . . . with a sense of the grandeur and vastness of the subject," undertook to write the story of the United States from the discovery of America to 1834, which he accomplished in part, reaching, in six ponderous volumes, the beginning of the national era. His attitude is best typified by the selection so often printed in the school readers under the title, "The Revolutionary Alarm." He conceived America under the symbol of liberty triumphant, creating a new heaven and a new earth, the "paramount interest in the history of the world." His tone, harmonizing with that lofty conception, was maintained with deadly monotony under the mountainous weight of his erudition—an erudition which aimed to secure and usually did secure complete accuracy in particular statements.

Francis Parkman undertook the writing of the Old French War because here "the forest drama was more thronged with appropriate actors than in any other passage of our history." Because his mind was "haunted with wilderness images day and night . . . plumed helmets gleamed in the shade of its forests, priestly vestments in its dens and fastnesses of ancient barbarism." With him the impelling motive was romance and drama, though he achieved classic results in description and narrative, and likewise in a kind

[2] George Tucker, *The History of the United States, from Their Colonization to the End of the Twenty-sixth Congress, in 1841.* 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 1856-58.)

of history which provides close-up, rational explanations of incidents and episodes.

None of the great writers mentioned, much less the numerous second rate historians, was endowed with the insight necessary to interpret the general movement with which he was concerned, and American history, in its best estate, was usually little more than an interesting story, crammed with instructive incidents, an excursion in patriotic emotionalism, or a long gallery of portraits sign-posted with appropriate moral precepts. All writers, however, were impressed with the "bigness" of the American nation, and there was beginning to be manifested some appreciation of the part which our practically limitless resources in land had played in its historical development. But as yet the Puritan influence, the fight against slavery, or the more recondite, if barren, constitutional problems of nationalism and separatism, obsessed the minds of historians to the exclusion of any fundamental interpretative philosophy.

Then came Turner, Wisconsin born, Portage bred. In the rhythmic beat of the Indian's paddle, the songs of the *voyageurs* on the opposite flowing rivers, he seems somehow to have sensed the systole and diastole of the historical process as conditioned by America's unique frontiers. Just how or when the germinal idea came to him we do not know. Important hints of it are in *The Character and Influence of the Indian Trade in Wisconsin,* his thesis for the doctor's degree from Hopkins, but there is no probability that the Hopkins of his day, which was more concerned with European history, and European "germs" in our own institutions, contributed much to his new views on America. Probably the theory emerged gradually, as a kind of essence, from traditions of the great waterway, and the reading of thousands of western documents assembled in the Draper Collec-

tion at Madison. Turner's was the type of mind in which seminal ideas not only germinated but grew and matured. Fostered by eager research, stimulated by teaching, by conference and discussion, he was finally prepared to embody them permanently in the famous thirty-three page pamphlet.

The argument begins characteristically with the statement of a basic fact: The *Eleventh Census*, which had just been published, proclaimed that what had formerly been called the "frontier," was now so broken in upon by settlement that, practically, the frontier no longer existed. "Up to our own day," Turner comments, "American history has been in large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of the American settlement westward, explain American development. Behind institutions, behind constitutional forms and their modifications, lie the vital forces that call these organs into life, and shape them to meet changing conditions. Now the peculiarity of American institutions is, the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people—to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life."

Here are the four key sentences and it should be observed that they fall into two pairs. The first two sentences describe the facts: That we have been, largely, a colonizing nation; that free land, and its disappearance, beneath the onrush of settlement, explain our history. The second pair states the philosophy applied: "vital forces," not formularies, are what make history. And, finally, what philosophers would call the "dialectic," or mode of operation: American institutions have been forced to adapt themselves to the fact

of continuous expansion, to endless repetitions of growth from the primitive to the mature on successive frontiers.

Any intelligent reader can memorize those four sentences. And whoever will make them actual mental pabulum, then betake himself to desert, forest, or mountain to reflect on their implications, will unavoidably reach results similar to those Turner stated in the pamphlet. For the whole philosophy is implicit in those two pairs of sentences.

Let us see: Free lands are a cause of movement from older, well peopled districts to newer, unpopulated or slightly settled areas. If a man of family, who in 1837 was living in New York City, found himself bankrupted by the panic and saw no way to retrieve his fortune there, he would assemble what little money could be saved from the wreck, and go West to take up land and make a farm home. In very fact, hundreds of such families, at that period, settled in the oak openings of southern Michigan, thereby laying solidly the foundations of one of the most progressive western states. Land in that locality was of choice quality; the Indian title had been "extinguished," and the red men sent beyond the Mississippi. The government, when ready, would sell the soil at $1.25 per acre, and squatters who really wished to make homes were rarely molested for a year or two, especially if they would combine to defend their claims against intruders; so a settler could begin hopeful operations with very little actual cash.

But suppose that he had none at all? Many a laboring man or artisan found conditions in eastern cities discouraging, and longed for an independent mode of life. Friends could lend him just enough to pay for transportation up the lakes to Milwaukee or Manitowoc. Arrived there he could select a small tract of timbered land, the best kind for the poor man, build house and barn of trees felled in clearing, sell

cordwood to the lake steamboats, or chop and grub for others to earn necessaries, and in a couple of years—given health and reasonable "luck"—he might have the beginnings of a valuable farm. Meantime, he and his would enjoy a home in the free West, and would nurse dreams of future prosperity.

### NATIONALISM

In either case, however, the settler leaned heavily upon his government. If roaming Indians came back to their old haunts to hunt and fish, he asked the United States Indian agent to remove those "disturbers" of his peace. If he and his neighbors were hard pressed for money to pay for their lands, all joined in an appeal to the president to postpone the sale day to a more convenient time. Roads to the lake port being necessary to enable them to market, first wood, tan bark, etc., and then surplus grain, and to haul supplies back to their homes, all joined once more in petitioning the government to build public highways. The harbor needed deepening, safety of ships called for lighthouses and buoys, cheapness of loading and unloading depended on convenient wharves. Who should supply those utilities if not a generous "Uncle Sam."

At a hundred points, the life of the settler on land acquired from the United States, touched and was influenced by the activities carried on at Washington. Until after the new community was populous enough to demand a state organization, the new settler felt himself to be wholly sustained by the nation; and this was only less true after statehood. The post office, the land office, the territorial roads, the school fund, the river and harbor improvements, all derive from congressional action and compete unequally with the

state activities to capture and hold the interest of western citizens.

These are some of the reasons why Turner calls the West a nationalistic region. Men could not help being nationalists when their prosperity, and occasionally life itself, was in the keeping of the central political authority. The constitution, it has been well said, was established by thirteen states created out of thirteen distinct colonies. The nation which emerged from the Civil War, however, had been created most largely by the national government itself—out of what had once been a vast overplus of free western lands, occupied gradually by people who emigrated from the eastern states and from Europe.

And, just as the dependence of western folk upon the national government made them nationalistic in sentiment, so the response of the government to the demands of pioneers stiffened and matured its powers. Whenever Congress voted money for internal improvements; when, under the so-called "American system" of Henry Clay, a tariff was laid on hemp, flax, and wool to improve the home market for the western grower of those staples; and as often as legislation was passed regulating the disposal of public land, the central government was confirmed in its implied or express powers. With every such exercise these grew stronger and more definite.

While Turner pointed out those conclusions, our intelligent recluse, if he is really cudgelling his brain to find out what the four given sentences involve, will reach essentially the same objective. He is not so likely to see why the frontier operates to prevent the growth of sectionalism. Turner thinks it has done so because its people came more largely from the Middle States than from either Old New England or the Old South, the two most intensely sectional, or self-centered,

of American social areas. Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland lay between those two sections, sharing some of the qualities of each but with a more mixed social complex and with economic interests crossing and recrossing all boundaries. Those states were neither linked in complete sympathy with one or the other, nor did they possess a conscious unity within themselves. The Middle States were a "mediating" region. Emigrants from their borders brought to the West a more tractable, or less local-minded, population than either the South or the Northeast supplied.

## THE QUESTION OF DEMOCRACY

If the West was nationalistic and prepared, on the whole, to sustain centralizing tendencies in government, it was at the same time sturdily democratic. Turner phrased it thus: "But the most important effect of the frontier has been in the promotion of democracy here and in Europe. . . . Complex Society is precipitated by the wilderness in a kind of primitive organization based on the family. The tendency is anti-social. It produces antipathy to control, and particularly any direct control . . . the frontier individualism has from the beginning promoted democracy."

The democracy issue has attracted a large share of such critical comment as the Turner hypothesis has thus far encountered. One writer boldly declares Turner's generalization false and affirms that American democracy came not from the American forest but from Europe.[3] None knew better than Turner that in the transit of culture, from the Old World to the New, America received a body of democratic ideas, just as she likewise received an opposing body

[3] Benjamin F. Wright, *Yale Review*, N.S. 20, 349-365.

of aristocratic and monarchistic ideas. Also, Turner thoroughly understood the accelerated pace at which the democratic ideas moved toward conquest in the fifteen years before the Declaration of Independence. But to affirm that it was the ideas brought over by colonial immigrants, and their intensification on the eve of the Revolution, due to the emotional and intellectual ferment of the time, that produced our historic American democracy is to ignore the plain distinction between American social history and that of Europe. Europeans themselves knew the difference. Burke, Rochefoucault, Tocqueville, Chevalier, Martineau, and a host of others, might be summoned as witnesses. All recognized something distinctive about the manifestation of the democratic spirit in America. What was it? Crevecoeur stated a part of it. By settling on a farm in the New World the European immigrant was creating for himself a bright-hued future. "Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal step the progress of his labor. . . . From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury and useless labor, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence." The typical American democrat was a farmer and land owner. This he was in late colonial days, when Burke proclaimed the futility of trying to conquer him; and he remained so down to Turner's time. The rise of industrialism, indeed, brought in another source of democratic development, aside from the influence of free land and the frontier. But that democracy, in Turner's "first period of American history," was a subordinate type, and even as such it had been indirectly influenced by the frontier. Every man in the towns, said Harriet Martineau, was an independent citizen, every man in the country a land owner. Insofar as the laboring class differed from the European proletarian democracy, the cause lay in a set of peculiar conditions surrounding

labor in this country, the most significant feature of which was the open frontier, inviting the industrially defeated or oppressed. This imparted to American city workers a sense of security, an independence which encouraged them to demand not alone factory legislation, but the establishment of free schools, parks, and other socially beneficial municipal institutions.

Perhaps the most striking difference between European and American democracy is in their respective attitudes toward fundamental change. Once, indeed, the "embattled farmers," schooled by years of propaganda and maddened by the killing of some of their own, fired shots which had somewhat prolonged echoes. But on the whole, the American farmer has been devoted to peace and peaceful solutions of complicated national problems, while the European proletarian is apt to resolve the Gordian knots in the Alexandrian manner. If America shall ever suffer the ruin of her independent farming class, she will doubtless have a democracy as clearly marked off from that of the past as the industrialists of the pre-Civil War days are distinguished in kind and quality from those of today. The proletarian type of democracy obviously is advancing toward dominance; its influence may in time be as nearly regnant as was once that of the rural democracy. For that reason, and because it has already achieved much in the way of democratic progress, its study is an essential part of American history and, in a sense, supplemental to the frontier hypothesis. Turner was not blind to that fact and in his personal teaching gave it full recognition. But to confound the democracy of the frontier with the democracy of the factory is unhistorical. Lecky's "hard, stubborn, and indomitably intractable" New Englander of 1776 was a product of the frontier; and he had

successors at every stage of the advance across the continent.

Paxson thinks the frontier contributed a kind of "inverted democratization that worked by levelling the exceptional man down rather than by lifting the common man up." Deflating, undoubtedly, was a phase of the process for the frontier applied different tests of merit than the older societies. But it was not always genuine merit that suffered in this way, while, as Turner saw clearly, the frontier always afforded a new chance to the meritorious unfortunates, so large a proportion of whom redeemed themselves by taking advantage of its plain but solid opportunities.

When Turner speaks of the frontier promoting democracy here "and in Europe," the last phrase may seem a trifle venturesome, but he may have been thinking of the democratizing influence of America upon France before the French Revolution, affirmed so confidently by a wide variety of writers. He had not at command our present-day collections of immigrant letters, English, Scandinavian, German, bearing to the home-folks tidings of a "free American" frontier where everyone can obtain as much land as he needs; raise livestock at will, pasturing summer and winter on unoccupied areas; where one is not called upon to doff the hat to superiors; where there is no horde of officials to eat out the people's substance. In short, where earth has about it many of the characteristics Europeans were wont to ascribe to heaven itself. He had few such letters, it is true, but books for immigrants contained hints enough to enable his seeing mind to appreciate the natural effect of such testimony upon social psychology abroad. The generalization is an inference behind which there can have been but little research, yet it is not for that reason untrue.

### AMERICANIZATION

One of the surprises in Paxson's notable essay on the "Frontier Hypothesis" is his treatment of Turner's ideas on Americanization. He says: "First of all, the concept of composite nationality. 'The frontier,' said Turner, 'is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. . . . The wilderness masters the colonist . . . he transforms the wilderness . . . here is a new product that is American.' But even when Turner wrote, there were forces in operation that were inconsistent with the idea of any complete amalgamation. He declared that 'the frontier promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people,' yet in his own State, only a few months earlier, the dominant social forces had been upset by an uprising of the foreign language groups, exploded by the Bennett Law. There had been less than complete blending and re-creation on the Wisconsin frontier, where thus far the Britishry of the earliest pioneers had generally overridden the newer groups of Germans, Irish, and Scandinavians."

It is to be feared that, in the above, Paxson is setting up standards of "amalgamation" which would prove too high to be attained even under the re-creative potentialities of the most dynamic of frontiers. Can it be that Turner, in 1893, when writing that "the frontier is the line of most rapid and complete Americanization" intended to convey the impression that, in a single generation, men of foreign speech would, on this frontier, become undistinguishable from the old colonial American stock?

Those who were intimately associated with Turner at the time the essay was taking form certainly did not understand the quoted phrases as Paxson seems to understand them. Turner, they felt, was thinking of the effect produced when

men who still remained essentially European in spirit and in habits went to the frontier and began contending with its untamed forces. He was assuredly not thinking of Americanization in the present-day sense, as a process of making over new European immigrants according to a preconceived American pattern. On the contrary, his emphasis was on the other side of the double process involved: his concern was to observe how the wilderness rudely disrupted the integrity of the European pattern, thus permitting the substitution of traits and habits which, by reference to the circumstances of their origin, must be called American. John Smith's Virginia colonists and the French settlers at Gallipolis, are reported to have begun falling timber in the primitive fashion, by nibbling all around the trunk, so that serious accidents occurred when forest giants fell in directions that were unexpected. The wilderness soon taught them the pioneer American way to fall a tree. Also, they learned to build comfortable log houses without calling in trained mechanics; to kill wild game in the wild woods, so unlike the Old World game preserves; to "corduroy" roads and bridges; and to think and do a thousand things in American ways which, as Europeans, they had never thought or done.

With this understanding of Turner's idea of Americanization, the illustration of the anti-Bennett Law Wisconsin Germans, which Paxson uses, does not jibe. Turner was a wary scholar and he must have been, for him, strangely off guard to leave for a future critic the opening Paxson supposes to exist. It is not likely that Turner regarded linguistic conformity as an indispensable condition of true Americanism, at least not at that early stage in social unification. Besides, Turner, through direct contact with the campaign, was perfectly familiar with the facts in the Bennett Law case, which probably seemed about as follows: The German

Lutherans and Catholics in Wisconsin—and other states—convinced that the A. P. A. were riding, became alarmed at the threat of the secular control of their parochial schools. On religious grounds, they determined to resist anything that would admit the thin edge of the wedge. That the opposition was not primarily linguistic their hearty compliance with an aroused sentiment for better English teaching in their schools proves. They opposed the Republican party on the Bennett Law issue just as in 1856 the Catholics of Wisconsin had opposed the same party as a harborer of Know-nothings—from defensive religious motives. Their reaction was normal for religious groups everywhere and in every time. It could be illustrated by the attitude of Episcopalians in the Revolutionary War, by the Quakers in that war and at numerous periods when military preparedness was an issue, and by the Virginia Presbyterians and other frontier sects in supporting Jefferson against the tidewater aristocracy. In none of these cases was a language question involved, but social non-conformity was quite as pronounced as it was among the anti-Bennett Law Germans.

But let us see more at large what Turner himself says about the process of Americanization: "Our early history is the study of European germs developing in an American environment. . . . The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization, and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and the Iroquois, and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment

is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs. . . . The fact is that here is a new product that is American. At first the frontier was the Atlantic coast. It was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense. Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American. As successive terminal moraines result from successive glaciations, so each frontier leaves its traces behind it, and when it becomes a settled area the region still partakes of the frontier characteristics. Thus the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines. And to study this advance, the men who grew up under these conditions, and the political, economic, and social results of it, is to study the really American part of our history."

## LIMITATIONS OF THE THEORY

Paxson's analysis assigns to the Turner theory a fourfold incidence; on the subjects of "composite race and Americanization, democracy, social re-creation in the light of frontier experience, and nationality." With this one can heartily agree while pointing out at the same time that Turner's "significance of the section" was closely knit with the frontier philosophy. And it should also be stressed that in his teaching and writing he played no favorites among historical facts, ignoring nothing that could help clear up a situation whether or not it happened to fall under the operation of the frontier hypothesis. Turner never permitted himself the luxury of an obsession.

For example: the adoption of the federal constitution was investigated under his guidance by Orin G. Libby, at the time a candidate for the Ph.D. degree. The study demonstrated that the result was brought about by sections of the country dominated by the business and propertied interests against the opposition of the small farming regions generally[4]—a modern version of what ancient Attica experienced in the "shore" and "plain" against the hill folk.

This was a rational corrective to the old assumption that the provisions of that historic instrument had been wrought out solely through the processes of debate as carried on in the federal convention. It proved that economic interests, and secondarily social interests, not exclusively reasonableness and patriotism, were the determining forces in producing the new national system. Says Libby: "The undertow of public opinion, deeper and stronger than the surface indications seen in the formal speeches, tracts, and convention arguments, has been neglected." Richard Hildreth had noted the fact of the geographical division on the adoption of the constitution and had explained the success of the movement by the "Federalistic" political views of that portion of the people who were massed in compact societies, held property, carried on business, and were devoted to orderly and good government. When Charles A. Beard, traversing the same subject, wrote *An Economic Interpretation of the Adoption of the Constitution of the United States*, he personalized the economic motive in the triumphant majority of the convention, and in the ratifying bodies. In this view the constitution becomes a political means for conserving and fostering the favored economic position not simply of a propertied

[4] O. G. Libby, *The Geographical Distribution of the Vote on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution.* (Published by the University, Madison, Wis., 1894.)

and commercial class as such, but also of the particular individuals who were concerned in obtaining its adoption.

Here we have what may properly be considered one supplement to the Turner hypothesis, and one whose recognition has grown more indispensably necessary with the passing years. Wealth in its various forms, and also its opposite poverty, is a power in men's hands to shape history. Wealth triumphed at the outset by embodying in the constitution principles of taxation which threw the main burden of the support of government upon persons rather than upon property, while the "have nots" triumphed under Jefferson. These alternations occur only occasionally along the pathway of American history, but they make up much of the history of Europe. It was but a short step from the Turner-Libby position to the Beard position, but, nevertheless, the step was an important one for an American historian to have taken.

The machine, which gives the world such profound concern at this time, is also, as Beard and others have pointed out, a force in historical development calling for special study, and for circumspection in historical interpretation. It is much more probable today than it seemed in 1893, that industrialism is destined to triumph over frontier—or over rural—democracy in the United States. Therefore, the technique of the industrial advance, which involves the organization of capital and the organization of labor, banking, transportation, trusts, and the methods by which political control have been sought by the different economic groups, is an essential study to one who would understand American history in its less obvious phases.

Turner, let us again remind ourselves, applied the frontier theory especially to the period which closed with the frontier's disappearance. He never claimed to have discovered in the frontier philosophy a universal solvent for

American historical problems. His mind was almost uniquely free from dogmatism. In his teaching he missed none of the keys which interpret American development, whether economic, social, religious, psychological or what not. True, he did not place all of them before the public in memorable settings, such as he gave to the frontier hypothesis, his very own contribution; but having bestowed upon the world that gift he could well afford to leave something for others to emphasize.

# FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER AND THE NEW DEAL

Curtis Nettels

In the personnel of the new deal historians are conspicuous by their absence. As a general thing, the most eminent among them have never played an active part in forming public policies and putting them into execution. President Wilson, of course, was a professional historian, but if his fame depended upon the history he wrote, he would soon be forgotten. Historians did have one brief moment in affairs when many of them served on President Wilson's staff of experts at the Paris Conference. But the outcome of its labors demonstrated only the axiom that professional historians accomplish little in shaping the immediate trend of events.

The all-embracing head of the new deal has only the layman's interest in history. There is not an historian in the brain trust—a coterie of lawyers, economists, and experts on government. Only one historian has received a high appointive office since March 4, and that in the diplomatic service. When so many of the framers of the new deal are professional students of society—college professors and the like—it may seem at first glance that history in the United States has sunk to a low level of influence on current policy.

That, however, is not the case. A strong current running through the philosophy of the new deal may be traced directly to the interpretation of American society developed by historians during the past forty years. One of the greatest landmarks in American historiography is the year 1893,

when Frederick Jackson Turner published his epoch-making essay on the significance of the frontier—an essay that may justly be said to have revolutionized the study of American history. Before Turner, American history had been chiefly a product of New England. Beginning with Bradford and Winthrop, running through Cotton Mather, Hutchinson, Belknap, and the Massachusetts Historical Society, and rising to heights in Bancroft, Fiske, Parkman, the many Adams', Osgood, and Channing, the New Englanders presented a view of American development which was mainly New England writ large. The New Englanders, conscious of their own rectitude and of a vital meaning in human endeavor, became the recorders and preservers of documents par excellence. They have exemplified, affirmatively, the maxim of Burke that people will not look forward to posterity who will not look backward to their ancestors. And since New England has always had an unduly large share of the educated men of the country, and because it became the early schoolmaster of the nation, the New Englanders spread their interpretation of American society over the whole land. American self-government came from England by way of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay, Boston started the American Revolution, our industrial revolution occurred in New England, Puritanism became our national faith, the Yankees gave the nation its deep respect for education, Concord was the mainspring of American literature, emigration from New England peopled the continent, and New England Abolitionists precipitated the Civil War. Leaders from other sections who were glorified—Washington, Hamilton, Marshall—were those congenial to the New England spirit. Such was the view of the American past held by our fathers—the view that Turner has been so largely instrumental in recasting.

Turner saw American society, not as an importation from England via New England, but as a new order rising from the native soil. In one of his essays he quotes a Westerner writing to friends in the East. This pioneer advised that "if you can't stand seeing your old New England ideas, ways of doing and living and in fact, all of the good old Yankee fashions knocked out of shape and altered, or thrown by as unsuited to the climate, don't be caught out here." In Turner's view, the American people were not New Englanders moved West, but a blend of many native and European stocks. The first main stream of Americanization flowed through Pennsylvania to the backcountry of the South and across the mountains into the upper Ohio Valley, Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Southwest. Then came the mid-nineteenth century immigration to the port of New York, the advance up the Hudson, and the settlement of the states adjoining the Great Lakes. In this process of western settlement, the dominant factor was cheap land, abundant in extent, excellent in quality. The conquest of the wide open spaces and their fertile resources bred an intense individualism in productive business enterprise, in company with a strongly nationalistic spirit. Cheap land offered economic opportunity to the downtrodden people of the older regions. In the West, the average man achieved independence and a better standard of life. Self-reliance and self-respect flowered in a buoyant political democracy. The occupation of the continent originated the great political issues of the nineteenth century: the West became the dominant area, giving to the nation Jackson, Jefferson Davis, Lincoln, and Grant; the economic activity of the country centered in the exploitation of continental resources and the growth of the domestic market. All the time the West served as a national safety valve, providing an enriching outlet for the surplus labor, capital, products, and professional skill of the East.

These views of Turner sank deeply into the consciousness of the western people. Scores of his disciples carried the gospel to thousands of students throughout the country. Where is the student of American history in the West who has not been deeply influenced by Turner's ideas? Nor were the Westerners slow to recognize the essential truth of the picture which he sketched. They were too close to the process to be deceived. The face of their land, their ways of life, the ideas in their minds—all these made them receptive to the new interpretation of their past. Occasionally an outsider has attempted to overthrow the Turner thesis, but the faith of the Westerners in their place in the nation's history remains unshaken.

Now, the frontier explanation has a powerful bearing upon the present. If equality of opportunity gave birth to American institutions, and if cheap lands of unoccupied frontiers made such opportunity possible, what of the present, when the vacant reaches of fertile land no longer exist? Turner himself saw the problem—the problem of maintaining democracy and opportunity when the old favoring conditions are gone. A memorable passage in his presidential address before the American Historical Association in 1910 might well have been written in 1933. He said:

> Two ideals were fundamental in American thought, ideals that developed in the pioneer era. One was that of individual freedom to compete unrestrictedly for the resources of a continent—the squatter ideal. . . . The other was the ideal of democracy. . . . The operation of these ideals took place contemporaneously with the passing into private possession of the free public domain and the natural resources of the United States. But American democracy was based on an abundance of free lands; these were the very conditions that shaped its growth and its fundamental traits. Thus time has revealed that these two ideals of pioneer democracy had elements of mutual hostility and contained the seeds of its dissolution. The present finds itself engaged in the task of readjusting its old ideals to new conditions and is turning increasingly to government to preserve its traditional democracy.

The continuance of prosperity and the prevalence of American opportunity after the closing of the frontier. especially in the years 1915-29, led many students of American society to question the validity of the Turner thesis. Such was the burden of an address by Professor T. J. Wertenbaker before the Mississippi Valley Historical Association in 1931. If high wages and ample employment continued after the passing of the frontier, was it responsible for their existence in the past? In retrospect, however, we see that the years 1915-29 were an interruption in the normal course of American development. The war and the peace called forth tremendous national expenditures—financed by the credit of all the leading countries of the world—which supplied an impetus to employment akin to the stimulus previously given by newly opened frontiers. Now that the acceleration of war has spent itself, the basic conditions of American economic life reassert themselves, and in so doing reëmphasize the meaning of Turner's interpretation of our past.

One striking view of the engineers of the new deal is their perception of the passing of the economic stimulus of the frontier. The natural process of our development which provided outlets for unemployed labor has reached its end. The frontier was compatible with unbridled individualism and ruthless competition because the unfortunate victims of the struggle could begin anew in the West. Undeveloped lands afforded a source of credit for people of small means, or without means at all, because their labor could be counted upon to raise the value of the lands they cleared in the prairie or the wilderness, and so to provide an excellent security for money borrowed. Now that this automatic adjustor does not operate, something must be put in its place. Ruthless competition must give way to an economic society so ordered as to perpetuate at least a semblance of the democracy and op-

portunity which were the legacy of the process of occupation of unused lands. President Roosevelt has often spoken in this vein. He has realized that the economic policies suitable for an expanding nation are not wholly suitable for maturity. As long as the mass of the people could earn a decent livelihood, little effective protest was offered against the exploits of the captains of industry and the masters of finance. Competition, however, no longer provides its own natural adjustment; hence a politically controlled adjustment must take its place.

The democratic legacy of pioneer days opposes vigorously the conditions of today which threaten to destroy the American tradition of available opportunity. It is highly significant that Mr. Roosevelt's vision of a new deal made its most powerful appeal to the parts of the country that have been recently influenced by the frontier and indoctrinated with Turner's thesis. Certainly the western states, both northern and southern, nominated Mr. Roosevelt at Chicago. Wisconsin—the home of Turner—gave Mr. Roosevelt a larger proportional vote than any other normally Republican state. And in Wisconsin many of the ideas of the new deal had been zealously advocated by the Progressives years before the upheaval of 1933. When Governor La Follette presented his program for a controlled state economy to the legislature in 1931, he introduced it with a summary of Turner's thesis and a call for new policies to replace the vanished frontier.

And now the rôle of the West in the new deal is most striking. Many of its leading directors come from states where the pioneer ideals of democracy and opportunity still enjoy a robust life. The list of Westerners in vital positions includes General Hugh S. Johnson, Lewis W. Douglas, Henry Wallace, Arthur E. Morgan, Harold L. Ickes, George N. Peek, and Jesse Jones, chairman of the R. F. C.

One would have difficulty in naming seven equally important administrators of the new deal.

Everywhere one sees evidence of the influence of the frontier interpretation in current discussion of the new order. Stuart Chase led the way in his influential book, *A New Deal*, in which he based his argument for a planned economy on the assumption that the frontier had ceased to afford relief from the harsh features of capitalism, old style. Not long ago Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Tugwell presented the same contention in a leading article in the New York *Times*. Since the continent has been subdued, each individual can no longer take an equal part in the contest for possession of the nation's wealth; hence, the free-for-all scramble of competition is out of date. In the August number of *Current History*, appears an article by Henry Steele Commager, "Farewell to Laissez-Faire." The unparalleled opportunities for exploitation which accompanied the westward movement, writes Mr. Commager, produced the early philosophy that government should keep its hands off business. Now the present *impasse*, coinciding with the closed frontier, has shattered the doctrine of *laissez-faire*. A review in the *Nation*, September 13, 1933, by Benjamin Stolberg concludes: "The NRA is a true social revolution in the simple sense that it expresses the most significant thing in our national life—the realization that the social frontier is also over."

Even in New England the force of the frontier interpretation has been felt. Listening in on the radio this summer, I was surprised to hear Governor Ely of Massachusetts, at the very citadel of New England history, assert that the NRA was necessary to perform the task once accomplished by the frontier. The tremendous progress of machinery, said Mr. Ely, continuing after the end of our internal expansion, has placed us in a dilemma from which we can rescue our-

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selves only by conscious social policies designed to create employment. Attorney General Cummings of Connecticut in his recent address to the American Bar Association presented a similar view. The times call for a growth of American law to meet changed conditions. Previously the free competition for the wealth of the continent developed an extremely individualistic philosophy of the law. Now, however, new concepts of coöperation are necessary, since the free movement of the unfortunate victims of modern industry to new areas is no longer possible.

Perhaps the most striking assertion of the frontier thesis in relation to the new deal has come from the lips of the chief of the NRA—General Johnson. In his Labor Day address at Chicago he advanced the view that sufferers from past depressions had been able to start anew in the West. He told the experience of his own earlier days—in the 1890's when he saw thousands of distressed peoples moving westward through Kansas to build self-sustaining communities in unoccupied lands. What is to be done now, when the old outlet is closed? The answer, according to General Johnson, is the NRA.

All this suggests the place of the historian in a democratic society. He can scarcely be expected to formulate current policies, participate in campaigns, and master the detail of present administration. So great is the mass of historical evidence and so difficult are the problems which confront him that, if he is true to his calling—if he achieves a valid insight into the broad movements of the past—he can have time and energy for little else. One cannot master the details of both the intricate past and the intricate present. The researches of the economist, the political scientist, and the lawyer afford a knowledge of immediate issues and often give intimate contacts with current affairs which the historian cannot acquire unless he forsakes the past. And perhaps the

historian's congenital distaste for partisanship unfits him for an active rôle in the rough and tumble of modern politics.

Yet the historian's influence is not negligible. At any time the ways of men's life must be drawn from the past. But as old buildings are frequently in need of repair—or ought to be torn down altogether—so likewise human institutions must constantly be renewed and old policies given new directions. Here the historian plays his part. His findings show how policies and institutions descending from the past came into being and why they survived. Thus history supplies to men who know the present a measure of the suitability of past institutions to modern life. If intelligent and courageous men understand what conditions brought forth an honored policy or custom, they will not hesitate to modify or abandon it in the face of contrary circumstances. Historians like Turner place the present in its appropriate setting. They make clear to laymen how the elements of modern society took form. But they generally leave to others the decision whether present conditions require the alteration, preservation, or abandonment of practices to which former conditions have given birth. Man is so reluctant to relinquish policies that have worked well in the past that he ought to understand the secret of their former success. He ought to know whether they are as appropriate to the present as they were to the past. Only history can provide the necessary clues.

# TURNER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIC LETTER TO CONSTANCE LINDSAY SKINNER

*Edited by* Joseph Schafer

The late Frederick Jackson Turner, during the last few years of his life, was frequently called upon by those wishing to descant upon his distinguished career, for biographical details which they might use. He is known to have written some half dozen long letters to satisfy such requests, and most if not all of these now repose in the vaults of the Huntington library, official custodian of the Turner papers. Among them is the original of the letter published herewith, whose recipient, Constance Lindsay Skinner of New York City, kindly furnished us a copy with the authorization to print it in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History.* We are also under obligation to Miss Skinner for the interesting account of the circumstances under which the Turner letter was secured. Her statement constitutes the appropriate introduction to the Turner letter.—Editor.

## NOTES CONCERNING MY CORRESPONDENCE WITH FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER

Constance Lindsay Skinner

My first volume in the chronicles of America series (Yale university press) was *Pioneers of the Old Southwest; a Chronicle of the Dark and Bloody Ground.* It was published in 1919. While at the convention of the next American historical association after the publication of my volume, Dr. Allen Johnson, editor of the series, wrote me that Professor Turner had spoken favorably of my book, adding:

'You can feel more than flattered by this interest on the part of America's greatest living historian.'

Presently I was asked to collect frontier material for an anthology. I wrote requesting Professor Turner's permission to use extracts from his 'Significance of the Frontier;' and received it. About the same time I reviewed his book, *The Frontier in American History*, for the *Literary Review of the New York Evening Post* (later the *Saturday Review of Literature*) of December 4, 1920. I sent him the review and we argued by letter because I thought he had not given enough credit to the Ulster Scots, who were already frontiersmen in Ireland and brought their democratic ideals with them to the American forest. I stood up for the other Scots, too, pointing out that the Highland clans were as individualistic as Indians and, in short, that the Scottish race brought the true democratic 'germ' to the new world and were the nurses of it on the first western frontier. Which was all only an item in his vast field of knowledge and he did not quarrel with it, while advancing modifying facts. But he did make merry over my Scotch ardor and clannishness, and accused me of bringing 'Scotch Metaphysics' in to bolster my theory. He had asked me about myself, my ancestry and youth, and had been interested that I, like himself, was frontier-born.

This last explains some of his autobiographical statements about his youth, with which his remarkable letter closes: for instance, in saying he was neither of Scotch nor Irish ancestry, he was again referring to my three-quarters Scotch heritage. He wrote to me about his frontier experience because he knew I could understand and feel it all—it was like my own life in childhood at a northern fur-trading post, my father the leader there as his had been at the Portage, and the 'society' composed of pioneers of all nations. and Indians, as it was at the Portage—only *we* missed out on the Pomeranians, but we had South Americans, which Portage hadn't!

Later I asked him if he would scan an outline I had made for a long historical work, or for a series of volumes. He said he would, but I must promise not to tell any one because it was his habit to refuse such requests. He had

written a great deal about the valleys of America, but it was the rivers themselves that thrilled me: the movements of peoples on or along the great running waters not of America alone but of the world. I was convinced that rivers—the perpetual motion in the quiet land—had had, and must ever have, a powerful influence on the temperament and imagination of mankind, apart from their obvious material influences in the development of river craft and river trade, etc. He pointed out to me, after reading the outline, that I had set myself work and study which might occupy twenty years to a lifetime, according to how many fascinating by-paths I might follow to their ends, while engaged in my researches! However, he thought this was nothing to daunt me if I wanted to do it. His suggestions were largely responsible for my decision to abandon this ambitious, not to say monumental, project (for the carrying out of which, by the way, I had no funds whatever!) and trying to adapt the idea of the rivers to a feasible plan. The first step was to delete the globe at large, and to content myself with the rivers of North America, about which I already knew a little through my fur-trade researches and also because I had lived on one river path of the trappers and touched others, and through my studies of Indians and of a few frontier settlements. Gradually, as the lives and characters, the occupations, the folklore, the 'human interest,' in short, of the varied river folk took precedence, the rivers of America became specially a literary, not an historical, subject; and not a several-volume work for me to write, for any single author to write, but a series to be written by authors from the various river sections who 'had it in their blood.' The rivers of America series is now under way, with Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., as its publishers.

The casual reader may think it a far cry from Turner's letter to a literary series on the rivers of America. Yet the link is there: since 'rivers' will prove to be only another way of treating 'sections.' The inspiration of his influence was to turn the thoughts of those who came under it more intensely upon America, as a land and a nation unique in the world, having a history like no other. And, reading

Turner, you cannot escape the beauty of America. He was a great scholar without being scholastic: scholarship, to him, was not an amulet to be worn round the necks of a caste: all arrogance and egotism were foreign to him, neither acclaim nor antagonism could sprout them, for the seed of them was nowhere in him. He was without jealousy because he was honest, because the fibre of his mind was true: and because, being sincere, he labored for knowledge and not for ambition. He was like a river himself in the outflowing generosity of his mind, giving to all who asked. This letter is proof of it. He had literary gifts of a high order. His style is distinguished. Its obvious virtues are clarity and rhythm. Less definably, there is a sound of beauty and sometimes a look of brightness, a shining, in many of his paragraphs as they emerge from the printed pages and pass through the reader's mind. This feature of his literary talent has its origin, I am convinced, in his frontier childhood: in the many brilliant colors, the broad expanse of changing lights and shadows, and the rhythmical, musical motions of winds and waters in his wilderness environment. These were before his eyes and in his ears during childhood and early youth; that is, during those years before intellect begins to play its part in using learning, or acquired thought-substance, to create more thought, and when all mental impressions come through the senses, and come powerfully and vividly, because it is the time of thought-free youth. His literary use, later, of this store of sensory impressions, of wilderness cadences and colors, may have been wholly unconscious (though I doubt it). Certainly, he was not unconscious that his look at the historical frontier was that of a frontiersman looking upon his own; nor that in his interpretation of the life of the frontier, and its significance, he drew upon his experience as a man who had first become aware of a human society, and of himself as an individual and integral part of it, in an environment of rhythmic freedom and beauty. As the geographers continue, ever more vigorously and successfully, to contend with the economist for the soul of man, Turner's stature will enlarge and his work as an interpreter

of America will be found to have a vaster significance than has yet been conceded to it.

COMMUNICATION FROM FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER TO CONSTANCE LINDSAY SKINNER

Cambridge, Mass.
March 15, 1922.

I'm afraid I'm not equal to a brief *biography* of myself and my connection with Western history. You will probably find what you need—and a lot more—in these references:—

General comments.

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'History' pp. 248, 249, 253 (col. 1) 256 (col. 1).
Pol. Science Quarterly Dec. 1921.

*Bibliographies* have been published in the Johns Hopkins University list of publications by their Ph.D's, edited by J. M. Vincent—not up to date. The list is rather too long for your use. Perhaps my 'Frontier in Am. Hist,' 'New West' and the reference to indexes of Am. Hist. 'Review' and Am. Hist. Association for collected docts & articles would do for the western end of it. But there is a western interpretation also in my article on U.S. since 1865 in the Encyclopedia Britannica (1910?), and in my part of the Guide to Am. History, 1912, by Channing, Hart and Turner. I did the revision of western data, and the period since 1865. Also my articles on 'Frontier,' 'Sectionalism' and 'Western Politics' in McLaughlin & Hart's *Cyclopedia of Government*, embody western studies. My List of References in the History of the West (revised edition, Harvard University Press) might be mentioned. It indicates a scheme of study, with books, etc. In the Am. Antiquarian Society *Proceedings*, Oct. 1919 XXIX, I published an article on 'Greater New England in the Middle of the Nine-

teenth Century'—devoted to an estimate of the amount of the Yankee element in the West about 1850, and the reactive effects in New Eng.

I have given much attention to western history, but rather as a process in American development in general, than as a region in itself. My early training was in medieval history, and the aspects of social and economic developments and expansions in that formative age, I probably carried over into my conceptions of how American history should be viewed—older society developing in or adjacent to the wilderness. A thesis in my junior year—the University of Wisconsin—on the Fur Trade in Wisconsin which was substantially like my doctoral dissertation in the Johns Hopkins University (Studies vol. IX 1891) indicates an interest in the frontier as a factor in American history and in the social and economic background, or foundations. This address with 'Significance of the Frontier' was preceded by a paper 1892 on Problems in American History, (cited in my book p. 1). But I had already published a little pamphlet of a few pages. 'Outline Studies in the History of the Northwest' (Charles H. Kerr & Co. Chicago) in 1888. This was a slight syllabus for club studies. In the Chicago 'Dial,' I reviewed the first volumes of Roosevelt's Winning of the West in August 1889 and suggested a different point of view approaching the subject, and the need of a history of the continuous progress of civilization across the continent. The Frontier paper was a programme, and in some degree a protest against eastern neglect, at the time, of institutional study of the West, and against western antiquarian spirit in dealing with their own history.

The paper was regarded as a 'curious' view by Edward Everett Hale, and some other correspondents; but John Fiske wrote me on February 6, 1894 (see his Old Virginia 1897 II Chap XV p 270 for the influence) that he was working toward the same perspective, and called the essay 'admirable,' so I 'had faith in Massachusetts!' remembering also Parkman and Winsor and Roosevelt, all of Harvard training—though I wasn't a disciple of Harvard at the time, by any means.

The Frontier paper made an appeal, oddly perhaps, to the editor of the International Socialist Review, of Chicago, which republished it shortly after (vol VI, 321), and to the 'educators,' especially to the Herbart Society, which republished it, with some additional matter by me, in the Fifth Year Book of the National Herbart Society, and to the economists (republished in Bullock's 'Readings in Economics,' and in Marshall's (Univ. of Chicago) volumes of similar selections, etc.

In the form of the 'Problems of the West,' restating many of the Frontier paper's interpretations, it was refused by Mr. Horace Scudder of the Atlantic, but in 1896 at the request for an article by the late Walter Page, then the editor, I adjusted the paper to the Bryan campaign and he accepted it.

Meantime out of a course on 'The Economic and Social History of the U.S.' (treating different periods, in different years) I evolved the course in the History of the West, the first, I think, in the country. It seemed to 'take;' and now something like half the states have such a college course, and many of the leading universities, east and west, include it in their curriculum. A considerable portion of the instructors were trained in my seminary.

In studying our social and economic development, and the frontier advance, I saw at once, that the frontier passed into successive and varied regions, and that new sections evolved in the relations between these geographic regions, and the kinds of people and society which entered them and adjusted to the environment; and that these sections interplayed with each other and reacted on the old East and on the nation, in economic life, political forms and legislation, and in social results and ideals as expressed in education, literature, religion, etc. In short, the national spirit—Uncle Sam's psychology—was a complex, due to a federation of Sections. Behind the apparent state and nation type of federation lay the federation of sections, explaining manifestations of so-called State sovereignty, which are, more deeply, manifestations of sectional differences. This I had suggested in the paper on 'Problems in Am. History,' al-

ready referred to, and in the Herbart Society version of my 'Frontier.'

I have kept at work on this companion piece to my Frontier in various regional or sectional studies, and quite a literature has resulted. See A. W. Small (Univ. of Chicago) *General Sociology* 282-3 note, C. A. Beard *Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, 5, F. J. Turner, 'Sectionalism in the United States,' in McLaughlin and Hart's Cyclopedia of Am. Government, and ibid Geographic Influences in American Political History, abstract in Bulletin of the Am. Geographical Society XLVI, 591. See also Barnes (Clark Univ) in Encyclopedia Americana (19th ed.) S. V. History 256, and especially his article in Journal of Geography May 1921 vol. XX p. 199, and p. 330 (Dec. 1921).

The importance of regional geography in Am. History is also emphasized in my *Rise of the New West*, and in my forthcoming book on the *U.S. and its Sections* 1830-50; and I have quite a mass of yet unpublished material on the subject, besides the chapters dealing with sections in my *Frontier* book.

I am emphasizing it, because along with my *Frontier* interpretation, I should wish to be thought of in connection with investigations into Sections, as a means of understanding America. Not merely North and South, and East and West, but the many inter- and intra-state sections. From another angle, my frontier studies emphasized the amount of unworked material on the influence of the frontier upon *foreign relations.* I found it necessary to go behind the diplomat and the treaties of annexation to the frontier forces and sectional interests. Such studies as my articles in the American Historical Review on French Policy (AHR X 249) and Atlantic XCII 676, 807, illustrate this interest. I have published a lot of documentary material on foreign relations, (with introductions and editorial work from archives in the country, France, England and Spain, on the period of the administrations of Washington and Adams. These can be reached by the index volumes to *Amer. Hist. Review*, and Am. Hist. Assoc. *Reports*, including the Reports for 1896, 1897 and 1903, II—see H. J. Ford in

*Chronicles.* Similarly the evolution of *Government* on the Frontier interested me, and my papers in Am. Hist. Review I on 'State-Making in the West in the Rev. Era' are illustrations of this kind of study.

So far my interest in *Agriculture* and rural life has been more in evidence through the work of students like Taylor, Hibbard, Coulter, Trimble, Stine and Nils Olsen and others (who also reflect the influence of my colleague, Dr. Ely). My interest in *Lands* likewise has rather stimulated studies by R. G. Wellington (Political and Sectional Influence of the Public Lands 1828-1842. Boston 1914); Geo. M. Stephenson (Political History of the Public Lands 1840-1862 Boston 1917); Miss A. C. Ford, Colonial Precedents of our National Land System (Madison 1910) and (in part) John Ise, Forest Policy and other students than as my own publication. These, except Ise's, were theses under my direction, suggested and worked out in my seminary.

My interest in the *Indian* helped (along with Dr. Thwaites' influence) to produce Miss Helen Blair's *Indian Tribes of the Upper Miss. Valley* (Cleveland 1911) which she dedicated to me.

The theme of discovery and the conception of the 'Old West,' influenced C. W. Alvord and Lee Bidgood in writing their *First Alleghany Explorations*; and Archibald Henderson, *Conquest of the Southwest.* The conception of persistence of meaning, in American life, of the frontier ideals influenced Guy Emerson in his *New Frontier*—with the exception of the last named the books in this paragraph also were dedicated to me, as was also the volume, *Essays in American History dedicated to Frederick Jackson Turner* (N.Y. 1910). They help explain how the life of the teacher of graduate students checks his own historical output, but furnishes compensations. The above are rather illustrative *types* (and especially those related to my frontier interests) than complete statements of this side of my work. Since coming to Massachusetts the material available has tended to turn my seminary candidates for the doctorate rather to Mass. political history, but with emphasis upon economic and social *interpretations* of politics.

This is an outrageous kind of answer to your letter. But if you live through it, you will see that there is not the desire to exploit myself, but to give you a point of view in connection with my work—and a *point* can be reduced to the size of your pencil tip.

I was, as an undergraduate in Madison, given the freedom of the Draper Collection (with limitations! I had only a third of one year in Am. History) and the other western manuscripts of the State Historical Society; and I enjoyed the friendship of Draper and my colleague, Thwaites at the same time that I was trained in European institutional history by Professor William F. Allen (A.M. Harvard), who taught me ideals of scholarship even if he never made me the exact and critical scholar which he was himself. These two things reacted upon each other in my mind, especially the Medieval History and the manuscripts of Western History. I saw American history somewhat differently than it was presented in the books I read. I was for a year a graduate student in Johns Hopkins, where Herbert Adams and R. T. Ely had an inspiring influence upon ambitious students, and where Woodrow Wilson gave a special lecture course. (See Dodd's *Wilson* p. 20 but I was not a fellow student, only a member of W's courses in Government)—and see pp. 27-28 especially: also Wilson's comments on my 'West as Field for Historical Study' (Am. Hist. Asso. Report 1896. I). Wilson emphasized the neglect of the sympathetic study of the South, and I that of the West, in our conversations.

When I came back to Wisconsin I started a formal seminary in the library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and began to study, by periods, the social foundations of American history. The Frontier and the Section were aspects of these interests. I recognized them as *parts* of Am. history—*only* parts, but very important ones. However, I have not conceived of myself as the student of a region, or of any particularly exclusive 'key' to American history. I have tried to make some changes in the perspective, and as a pioneer, with others, I have found it necessary to talk a good

deal upon these aspects. But it is in *American processes* I have been interested.

I began my publication when Roosevelt and Winsor were active, and my colleague, Thwaites soon took up his editorial work. Roosevelt, though with a breadth of interests, was more concerned with *men* than with *institutions*, and especially with the strenuous life, and more particularly, the fighting of the frontier. Winsor approached the West as a cartographer and librarian. Thwaites' instincts were toward the romantic side, and toward editorial publication.

The West appealed to me as *a factor* in interpretive American history and the life, ideals and problems of the present. And the West meant also various *sections* with their reactions. While the great shadow of the slavery struggle still cast itself over history-writing, even in the works of Rhodes and Von Holst, and while the epic period of the West fascinated Roosevelt, Winsor and Thwaites, I was trying to see it as a whole—on its institutional, social, economic and political side, its effects upon the nation as a whole, and I saw that there was a persistent pervasive influence in American life which did not get its full attention from those who thought in terms of North and South, as well as from those who approached the west as fighting ground, or ground for exploration history. This was my opportunity. I was interested in economics, as well as in institutional history, and I soon (though an instructor) went into the Geological course (physiography) of Professor Van Hise, and tried to get a scientific geographical foundation. I spent my youth in a newspaper office in contact with practical politics, and in a little town at 'The Portage,' Wis. over which Marquette had passed. There were still Indian (Winnebago) tepees where I hunted and fished, and Indians came in to the stores to buy paints and trinkets and sell furs. Their Indian ponies and dogs were familiar street scenes. The town was a mixture of raftsmen from the 'pineries'—(the 'Pinery road' ran by my door), of Irish (in the 'bloody first' ward), Pomeranian immigrants (we stoned each other), in old country garbs, driving their cows to their own 'Common'; of Scotch with 'Caledonia' near by; of

Welsh (with 'Cambria' adjacent); with Germans, some of them university-trained (the Bierhall of Carl Haertel was the town club house); of Yankees from Vermont and Maine and Conn. chiefly, of New York-Yankees, of Southerners (a few relatively); a few negroes; many Norwegians and Swiss, some Englishmen, and one or two Italians. As the local editor and leader of his party, my father reported the community life, the problems of the farmer, the local news, (which I helped to 'set up'), went as delegate to state and national Republican conventions, assigned the candidates of his party to the varied nativities and towns of the county, as chairman of the Board of Supervisors, harmonized the rival tongues and interests of the various towns of the county, and helped to shepherd a very composite flock. My school fellows were from all these varied classes and nationalities, and we all 'got on together' in this forming society. Occasionally some fortunate youth went out to Montana or Colorado and returned to tell of mines and ranches. I rode on the first railroad into the pine forests of northern Wisconsin and fished along rivers and lakes in the virgin pine woods, where French names made real the earlier frontier, and followed Indian trails.

Is it strange that I saw the frontier as a real thing and experienced its changes? My people were pioneers from the beginning of the seventeenth century—though they did not go back to Scotch or Irish moors and highlands! One of my ancestors was the Rev. Thomas Hanford who early went to the frontier town of Norwalk, Conn. His parishioners complained that he called them 'Indian Devils'—a horrid thing to the Puritan pioneer. But Cotton Mather tells us that what he really said was that 'Every *Individual* is in danger of Hell fire,' and having defective teeth, he had been misunderstood. My people on both sides moved at least every generation, and built new communities—from Conn. to central and western Mass., to Vermont, to the Adirondacks, to the Dela. Valley in N.Y. and to western N.Y. to Mich. and Wisconsin, and others of the family to Nebraska and to Alaska. My father was named Andrew Jackson Turner at his birth in 1832 by my Democratic grandfather, and I still

rise and go to bed to the striking of the old clock that was brought into the house the day he was born, at the edge of the Adirondack forest. My mother's ancestors were preachers! Is it strange that I preached of the frontier?

Very sincerely and apologetically yours,

Frederick J. Turner.

P.S. Of course this is for your personal information and not for publication. Don't smile, please—

# SOME FACTS BEARING ON THE SAFETY-VALVE THEORY

*By* JOSEPH SCHAFER

PROFESSOR Fred A. Shannon's article in the July, 1936, *American Historical Review*, on 'The Homestead Act and the Labor Surplus' supplements nicely the publication in the *Political Science Quarterly* (June, 1935, and March, 1936) by Goodrich and Davison on 'The Wage-Earner in the Westward Movement.' Both studies are timely and add much to our detailed knowledge of the westward movement. And, as usual, the effect of new masses of exact information is to suggest greater caution in the expression of conclusions which must be to some extent theoretical.

The precise question under examination is this: Did wage-earners enter into the westward movement to such an extent as to constitute the frontier a 'safety valve' for labor? Goodrich and Davison, in their conclusion, announce that they 'cannot . . . accept the safety-valve doctrine *in the direct and literal form* in which it has been stated by Turner and his followers.' Yet, their 'analysis confirms . . . the opinion that the abundance of western land drew away many thousands of *potential* wage-earners who might otherwise have crowded into the factories "from the hill towns of New England" and "from the exhausted farms of New York and Pennsylvania." Though there,' they say, 'the "safety valve" was the farmer's rather than the worker's, we need not doubt that its operation tended to hold up the level of industrial wages.'[1]

This summary of their findings would seem to restrict the issue to a very narrow inquiry, namely: How directly

[1] *Political Science Quarterly*, li, 115. Italics mine.

did the cheap or free lands of the West influence the status of labor? It being conceded that the frontier held up 'the level of industrial wages,' the discussion, after all, is theoretical rather than practical; it really cannot matter much whether actual wage-earners left their jobs to go west and take up lands if the westward movement kept the ranks of industrial labor thin enough to make it necessary for *entrepreneurs* to pay high wages instead of low wages. That was all that was necessary to constitute the frontier a genuine 'safety valve' for labor.

In addition to its non-practical aspect, the question involves an element which is definitely non-statistical; for, if wages were kept up as an indirect consequence of the westward movement, it was largely because that movement produced an effect on the minds of both employers and employed and, while psychological effects can be clearly discerned, they cannot be measured.

Another preliminary inquiry is why attribute the safety valve theory to Turner? All of these writers acknowledge that it was already venerable when Turner wrote. Why not attribute it to Evans, the land reformer, who harped on it *ad libitum* in every key of the scale as Shannon shows? Or, why not father it upon Benton, who was perhaps its chief expounder in congress;[2] or upon Richard Rush, who gave so lucid a statement of it in one of his reports as secretary of the treasury;[3] or upon Webster, for an eloquent expression involving the idea in the seventh of March speech? Indeed, why not admit that the doctrine was implicit in Hamilton's plan to promote manufactures by means of protective duties which would raise industrial wages to something like a parity with agricultural earnings? For one thing, Hamil-

[2] *Register of Debates in Congress*, 21 cong., 1 sess., vol. vi, part i, p. 24.
[3] *Reports of the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States* (Washington, 1837). See report for 1827, ii, 405-406.

ton expected to attract many foreign immigrant workmen by providing industrial opportunities and does he not acknowledge that: 'Many, whom manufacturing views would induce to emigrate, would afterwards yield to the temptations which the particular situation of this country holds out to agricultural pursuits?'[4] The doctrine, indeed, can be shown to run far back into colonial history.

It is, of course, true that Turner, as the most original and philosophically fruitful of American historians of the last generation, is a shining mark. But there remains a question whether he can properly be regarded as the unreserved endorser of the views assigned to him in these essays. No doubt he—and more particularly his followers—sometimes used the term 'safety valve' without rigorously defining its application, but Turner was a wary scholar, and it is a nice question whether his expressions as quoted by Shannon[5] are at all out of harmony with the doctrine of a frontier influence such as Goodrich and Davison expressly recognize, and which constitutes an actual safety value, whatever they choose to call it.

When Turner addressed himself specifically to the question of how lands could be acquired by the class of persons under discussion, there is no vagueness in his language. For example, after summing up the cost of beginning a farm on government lands in the Ohio country, he says: 'The price of labor in the towns along the Ohio, coupled with the low cost of provisions, made it possible for even a poor day-laborer from the East to accumulate the necessary amount to make his land-purchase.'[6]

How are we to prove that poor laborers took that method of obtaining farm lands? The above merely indicates that

[4] *Ibid.* See report for 1791, i, 88.
[5] *American Historical Review*, xli, 639, n. 6.
[6] *Rise of the New West* (New York, 1906), 85.

Turner thought it 'possible' for them to do so. Goodrich and Davison very properly point out that reliable sources of information on the point are hard to come at, but that is a negative circumstance. With a full recognition of the weakness of remembered evidence in general, it is still true that traditionary information on a question of this kind can be very useful; and practically every middle western farming community half a century ago could have produced testimony respecting poor laborers who, in the pioneer period, acquired lands and in the course of time built up valuable farm properties.

Inasmuch as any country-reared person of sixty-five years or over should be an acceptable witness, I could take the box myself. The northeastern corner of Grant county, Wisconsin, in which my father's farm lay had, and still has, whole townships that are exclusively rural. In fact, there was no town or village nearer than eight miles from our home. But the farmers in a considerable number of cases, when I first became conscious of them, were persons who had been trained for a non-agricultural vocation. That, too, had been the means of securing a foothold as landowners. One had been a sailor, one a shoemaker, one a bookbinder, two were millers. One had worked a number of years as a farm hand.

The above mentioned were neighbors whose lands either adjoined my father's 400-acre farm, or were within a mile of it. On that farm a succession of 'hired hands' earned money and nearly all of them became farm-owners in their turn, some within the same community, one in Texas, one in South Dakota. Since this was a normal process, familiar to everybody, when we find for any frontier area that farm laborers are present in numbers, we are justified in taking

judicial notice that there is a source from which farm-owners are to be recruited.

This is one way in which the manuscript census, discarded by Goodrich and Davison as too indefinite a source, can be utilized to excellent effect. Studies made in Wisconsin in which the census is used show the presence of farm laborers everywhere in rural areas that one has a mind to look for them. An example is from the census of 1870 for a township in Dodge county. There were 46 'farm laborers' and, in addition, 36 other 'laborers.' In another town were 52 'farm laborers' and 64 'day laborers.'

These laborers, like the farmers themselves, were in part foreign-born, in part native-born, some in the eastern states, some in Wisconsin. We have no recorded proof, in the census, that they had been wage-earners elsewhere, but is that necessary? From the fact that they were so in Wisconsin we have a right to infer a similar status elsewhere and even that is not required to prove them among the 'wage-earners.' Neither does the census prove that they had been employed at other than agricultural labor before coming to Wisconsin, but no reason exists why they might not have been otherwise engaged.

Foreign immigration, from which Hamilton hoped to derive a large amount of industrial labor, was not as varied in the early nineteenth century as it became later, but before 1850 the country received appreciable numbers of Germans and of Irish. 'The German immigrants,' says Commons, 'moved westward and were hardly noticed. The Irish, however, congregated in the large cities.'[7] The German stream, if we can trust German writers who were a part of it, was made up, in some shiploads, of about equal parts farm-

[7] *History of Labor in the United States* (New York, 1918), i, 414. (Reference is to the period of the 1830's.)

ers and mechanics, with a sprinkling of others. However uncertain the proportions, both those groups were relatively large, while professional men, investors, and general business men were few. A large part of them, however, struck direct for that frontier which happened at the moment to be the chosen region for settlement from the point of view of obtaining cheap and good land.

A Wisconsin census inquiry relative to the county of Ozaukee showed that the families of 979 German family heads had a grand total of 531 'native-born' children of which number all except 25 were born in Wisconsin. This proves that those German families had in most cases moved westward directly on landing at American ports, so that they could hardly have been noticed in laboring circles of the East. On the other hand, 276 Irish families had 184 native-born children and only 91 of them were born in Wisconsin. The average age of the 93 children born elsewhere in America was 9.5 years. Here, so far as this locality is concerned, is the demonstration that the Irish sojourned a number of years in the more easterly states, and some can be shown to have had relatively permanent homes in Massachusetts, New York, or Pennsylvania before going west to take up lands. The inference is plain though we are still short of absolute proof that many of these people earned wages as a preparation for a farming career.[8] The Germans settled in this single county, had they also sojourned in the East, would have added a thousand workers to complicate the labor problem.

The study just cited was made from the 1850 census and presents dispersed Irish families who appear to have come to Wisconsin partly as individuals or small groups, as elements in the general immigration stream from the north-

[8] Joseph Schafer, *Four Wisconsin Counties* (Madison, 1927), 85-89.

eastern states. One township only was so largely occupied by Irish as to suggest a directed immigration. The same census, however, catches a group of 179 Irish laborers in a township of Waukesha county where grading on the Milwaukee and Mississippi railroad had been in active progress June 1. The names were secured from the contractor's roll, but the men were already gone and their ages, etc., could not be ascertained.

Ten years later virtual colonies of Irish are to be found recorded for areas in Grant and Iowa, in Dodge, Washington, and Fond du Lac counties. These were made up largely of families whose heads had earlier worked at railroad building near their then localities. As wage-earners they had amassed money, had then bought land and gone to farming. That, however, is not different, essentially, from the cases of other Irish, Cornish, Welsh, German, and Norwegian laborers in the lead mines of southwest Wisconsin who took advantage of the opportunity to buy lands and make farms. Such groups can readily be identified in the early censuses as laborers, but later social history knows most of them as farmers.

It is possible to forecast a census study which will yield much more direct and unimpeachable evidence on the quest for farm lands by wage earners. Many of the western states have long had within their limits industrial cities, such as Milwaukee is for Wisconsin. It is already known that, according to the 1850 census, Milwaukee had in residence 461 German 'laborers' and 1,165 German craftsmen.[9] The Irish laborers were more numerous proportionally than the Germans. If, now, it should become readily possible to take a list of the laborers of 1850, in Milwaukee, and identify the

[9] Joseph Schafer, 'Yankee and Teuton in Wisconsin,' *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, vii, 151.

same persons, or some of them, in the census of 1860, it would then be determined to what extent the wage-earners of one decade had become farmers in the next.

As yet such a study cannot be made; but within a few months, when the names occurring in the 1860 census for Wisconsin shall all have been indexed by counties, a work that has been going forward, with the aid of the WPA for several years, it can be made for this state. And while we shall have to wait for the demonstration, it would be surprising if an appreciable number of Milwaukee's wage-earners did not go into those counties where government land was still to be had after 1850, and settle down as farmers.

A very slight test has already taken place. The 1860 census index cards have been fully arranged for two eastern Wisconsin counties. A list was prepared from the 1850 census for Milwaukee of 100 persons described as 'laborers' in that census. We took the name of the man, age, and birth state or country; also, for identification purposes, we chose those who had wives and sometimes children, giving names, ages, and birth states. Fingering the cards of the first county fully indexed, we found about a dozen names that seemed to fit. On comparing with the census entries, however, none of these proved out. Trying the second county we obtained some fifteen prospects, and on making the comparisons, two of these were confirmed. Interestingly, one was an Irish laborer who in 1850 had been 26 years old, had a wife 24 and a son 1 year old, with no real estate. In 1860 he was a farmer with the same wife and six children, also a real estate rating of $1,000 and personalty of $220. The other was a German laborer, 35, with a wife 28 and a child of 6 months, who had an estate in 1850 of $400. In 1860 he, his wife, and first child are each ten years older, there are four other children, and a

farm property of $1,000 in real estate and $200 in personalty.

How many may be found by canvassing all fifty-five of the Wisconsin counties of 1860 can only be surmised, but the 2 per cent already identified is at least a promise of definite results one way or the other. In either case, here is an intimation that it is not well to be too contemptuous of the census as a source.

Diaries and letters yield a few stray facts. The diary of Jakob Baumgartner, who died in 1916 an outstanding farmer of Grant county, Wisconsin, is continuous for more than sixty years.[10] It was begun when Baumgartner, a Bavarian village boy, entered upon his career as a journeyman dyer. He later came to America with just money enough to reach St. Louis where he obtained work as a factory hand with a concern that was dyeing sheep pelts. After earning some money he passed up the river to Wisconsin, worked several years as a hired hand for a Yankee farmer, then bought land and began farming. He was one of the best farmers of our home neighborhood and highly respected, but no one thought of his antecedents as in any sense exceptional, for the farm population of the region embraced many former craftsmen.

The State historical society of Wisconsin published in 1918, under the editorship of the then superintendent, Dr. Milo M. Quaife, a remarkable collection of letters of *An English Settler in Pioneer Wisconsin.*[11] The writer was Edwin Bottomley, of South Crossland, England, where he had long worked as a pattern maker in the Crossland mills of which his father was manager. In 1842, this man, with his family and several friends, emigrated to America,

[10] Fourteen volumes. In Wisconsin historical library.
[11] *Collections* (Madison, 1918), xxv.

settling in western Racine county, Wisconsin, where he laid the foundation for the so-called 'English Settlement.' Of this community the memory still persists. To that colony came other mill-hands, the exact number being indefinite.

Another colony of English factory workers was founded about the same time in Dane county by a Liverpool organization called the 'British Temperance Emigration society.'[12] Factory workers organized the society, sent agents to Wisconsin to buy government land, lay out 80-acre farms, build log cabins, and begin breaking up land for the prospective settlers. Between 1843 and 1850, 696 persons came from England as a result of that movement, many of them known to have been wage-earners at home, and most of them became farmers.[13]

Less well documented is the story of an English colony of potters from Staffordshire who settled on farms in Columbia county and Marquette county, Wisconsin. But there were in this state colonies of Welsh people, of Scotch-Irish, of Dutch, Belgian, Luxemburger, Polish, Bohemian, Holsteiner, Italian, and others. No one can say, offhand, what proportion of wage-earners each embraced, or whether or to what extent they, as individuals, tried to find work in the industries before deciding to settle on the land as farmers.

Doubtless, far from atypical was the case of that young German who, reaching New York in the spring of 1841 with only a few dollars in his pocket and needing work, was assured by Germans there that he would have a much better chance of securing it in Cincinnati. He took the advice, worked in Cincinnati, in St. Louis, in Galena, and in Mineral Point. But, by 1847, as a territorial census shows, he

[12] William Kittle, *History of the Township and Village of Mazomanie* (Madison, 1900), especially 16-26.

[13] Manuscript material relating to this settlement is in the Wisconsin historical library.

was farming and a farmer he continued until his death in 1897.[14]

A source which the writers referred to appear to have neglected is letters of foreign-born immigrants written to their home people in the old country giving information about conditions in America. The collecting of such letters has been going forward actively for some years at various centers. The Minnesota historical society has specialized in letters of Scandinavian immigrants, the Wisconsin society in those of German immigrants. It is understood that the Library of Congress is also making collections abroad.

The work of assembling German letters has been greatly facilitated by a young historian of Bonn university who has been specializing on the history of emigration from one certain restricted district of the Rhineland which yielded a very large number of immigrants to the American states. His method has been to comb the district for such letters as are still preserved in the homes of his region, which letters he copies, sending to the Wisconsin society a carbon copy of each. In addition, he assembles data about emigrants from the public offices having to do with issuing passes to such persons.

From the last named sources he obtained and published[15] lists of the names of emigrants from the Adenau district for the years 1841, 1842, 1843, and 1844. He names 82 persons for the first year, representing 323 individuals; for the second year, 135 persons, representing 486 individuals. The other two years showed but 54 and 27 emigrating individuals respectively. The entire district had a population in 1840 of 22,999, so the outflow of the two big years amounted to nearly 4 per cent.

[14] This case is well known to me personally.

[15] In local Rhineland papers, hoping thereby to induce owners of letters to produce them.

Some of the letters of these emigrants are highly significant as revealing the conditions under which Germans found lodgement in America. Up to 1833, our investigator had found no letter from an Adenau immigrant which had been written from the eastern seaports, notwithstanding his file numbered between 300 and 400 such documents. An immigrant living near Chicago wrote, however, in 1847:

> A large proportion of the immigrants scatter in the sea-ports and their immediate neighborhood. This is particularly true of craftsmen and of those single men who had made no previous plan for settling in the West. Aside from them, no small proportion of those who are quite without means go onto farms [to work near the cities] because they can go no further. . . . A considerable portion of the balance are held up at various points. Since laborers are sought everywhere . . . many an immigrant abandons his plan to go farther. Others go as far as their money will carry them. Expenses of travel, and the rawest swindles will ultimately relieve them of the last 'shiner.' Then they stop and seek work, become industrious, thrifty day-laborers until they are able to buy themselves a lot and erect upon it a cheap wooden cottage. Then, in a couple of years, they go west with a small sum of money, or they are prepared, thus experienced, to begin business operations where they happen to be.[16]

That his picture is drawn to the life can be illustrated from the letters of individual German immigrants. Says one who emigrated in 1841, writing in 1858: 'Instead of working by the day, I now drive a good span of horses and a good yoke of oxen on my own land. With my family I have already cleared 230 acres altogether. Often enough we cleared 20 to 25 acres per year. Now I clear no more, since I have all that the family can work. . . . I have 8 lots of land, each of 80 acres.' He did not buy the land to sell, but to supply each of his eight children with an 80-acre farm.[17] 'Shoemakers and tailors have it very good in America,' wrote an

[16] Letter of Franz Löhr. Reprint in Wisconsin historical library, Wis. MSS, HO (letter unnumbered). All German immigrant letters noted in subsequent footnotes are on file in Wis. MSS, HO, Wisconsin historical library.

[17] The writer lived at Westphalia, Michigan. No. 326, No. 327.

immigrant who had bought land eleven miles from Milwaukee in 1840. So he wants his brother to come out with his brother-in-law, the two evidently representing those two trades.[18] A young man who sailed to New Orleans, from Germany, ascended the river in a steamboat, arriving at Cincinnati, December, 1845, with $5.00 in his purse. He obtained temporary employment at first. Then he worked for a milkman, delivering milk, seventeen months. Thereafter he worked for an English doctor several years, caring for the team, etc. Then he bought land in Indiana. In 1867 he had a farm of 400 acres valued at $5,000.[19]

In 1876 a recent emigrant wrote home, saying he had worked in Milwaukee, Chicago, and Grand Rapids. Now he wanted to buy land and could get 40 acres for from $1,300 to $1,500. He had not money enough to pay it all and asked his father's advice. Possibly he hoped to secure the offer of aid from home.[20]

One who has settled, in 1846, near Milwaukee, tells of several young German men who are earning money chopping cordwood, and of German girls who are serving as maids in the city. He says to his brother in Germany: 'If you were here with your children you could say: I am a rich man. If your girls were all out at service, you and your wife would not need to work any more and you could live like a rich aristocrat.'[21] He speaks of the affluence of those who came early and received their land at the lowest price. 'We,' he says, 'must earn off of them.' A cabinet maker's apprentice receives $150 for two years. 'Tailors and shoemakers do very well here and all single persons who can work are well off.'

[18] Milwaukee, December 9, 1840. No. 331.
[19] No. 396 *et seq.*
[20] No. 418.
[21] No. 324.

'My children earn much money,' writes from Chicago a German who says if he were in the old country he would be the poorest man on earth. 'Joseph and John each earn $16.50 a week and frequently, working overtime, they earn more.'[22]

It was not always easy to find paying work. One young German tried, unsuccessfully, in Chicago, and worked a few days at his trade in Milwaukee. Then he went to western Grant county, Wisconsin, where he did a job of land clearing to pay for his passage over. He will not be content, he says, until he can buy a small farm or rent one. But farming, too, sometimes refused its votaries a living. Here is the case of a man who, with his family, spent ten years in Nebraska on a farm; then, in 1882, he abandoned the place, which he was unable to sell, went to Houghton, Michigan, and with his two sons secured steady work in a mine.[23] Doubtless this man was unfortunate enough to settle in the sub-humid zone. By contrast, we have the case of a man who settled in Michigan on 80 acres of wild land in 1849 and prospered so well that in 1890 he could write that he had not needed to work personally for the past fourteen years.[24]

Some of the letters contain reports about German friends in America. One, written from Howell, Michigan, in 1862, speaks of a friend who lives on a 40-acre farm 'which he earned since coming to America.'[25] This writer adds, as an excuse for not looking up old friends more assiduously: 'Everyone who is here, like myself and many others, who want to earn themselves a home, they cannot seek for old neighbors [*Landsleute*]; they must go where they can earn most.' That he himself is trying to earn a farm appears from

[22] No. 318.
[23] No. 17.
[24] No. 36.
[25] No. 48.

a remark that, if his parents come over after he has acquired land, they may live with him free of expense to themselves.[26]

Some Germans found the way to a competence a long and dreary one. Thus a young man came to Kenosha, Wisconsin, where one of his brothers was a highly respected machinist. He worked hard a whole winter chopping cordwood. Next spring he planned to go to Pike's peak and had already bought part of his equipment when untoward reports from the new gold field caused him to abandon that plan. He rented his oxen to a farmer and worked on a farm himself till fall. Then he tried St. Louis. Later he went to New Orleans. He contracted malaria and lay sick for seven months. Still later he is farming, in what capacity we do not know.[27]

The pains German immigrants were at to inform the home folks about wages in the various industries suggests that a large proportion of them were dependent on earning in order to get a start in America. One example out of many that could be given is a letter written from Greenville, Illinois, in 1841. The writer mentions a long list of handicrafts which are compensated about equally at say $1.50-$2.00 per day. Laborers receive $1.00 per day; farm hands $10.00-$12.00 per month. Housemaids receive $5.00-$10.00 per month and they work only in the house, not in the field. He himself was farming and explained the advantages America held for the farmer.

A woman writing from Portland, Oregon, in 1922, about the family's history in America, says that her father lived in a town for one year in Iowa, then went on a farm. That was fifty-five years ago. Later he removed to Nebraska, suffered from drought and grasshoppers, and ultimately went

[26] This is in a supplement, No. 50.
[27] No. 54.

to Portland. This refers to an emigrant of 1867. Another man who came to America without means worked in a sawmill at Stillwater, Minnesota, several seasons, then worked a number of years in the lead mines of southwest Wisconsin, after which he went to Faribault, Minnesota, bought land and went to farming. His younger brother came out to him in Wisconsin, worked a year for good wages as a mason's assistant, and also went on a farm.[28] Obviously, the elder brother had been careless and unthrifty, as a certain proportion of the Germans were. One, writing in 1851, had been in America for several years and had worked at this and that—copper mining, waiting on table in a restaurant, etc., but he had saved nothing and had to disappoint his old parents who were expecting a remittance from him.[29] One adventurous soul, however, disappeared from the view of his friends in 1850 and twenty-two years later suddenly reappeared from California, where he had become well-to-do.[30]

'Don't let yourselves be caught for military service,' writes a Wisconsin German to his young brothers in 1851. 'By us you could earn yourselves a capital in [the required] three years and fill your savings bank.' The evidence that young men fled in large numbers from Germany to escape military service is overwhelming, and it goes without saying that in most cases those youngsters would depend on earning wages for a few years before going on farms. In some cases, no doubt, they worked themselves into permanent city jobs. One of the immigrants of 1854, for example, tried to obtain work in New York City, but failed because foreigners were landing at the rate of 5,000 per week. He went to northern New York, but found nothing there. Turning south into Pennsylvania, he stopped at several towns and finally se-

[28] No. 75, No. 78, No. 79.
[29] No. 88.
[30] No. 87.

cured work with a big sugar merchandizing firm in Philadelphia. He was then well situated and he says he has helped other Germans to find employment. At some periods, when a depression was on, it was impossible to obtain work, and, as a Joliet, Illinois, German wrote in 1873, many young persons on that account returned to Germany.[31]

It is by no means contended that the bits of evidence presented above prove the affirmative of the safety-valve theory in the sense in which Goodrich and Davison or Shannon define it; they merely show that the negative ought not to be assumed lightly. The population of the western states, even before the frontier conditions disappeared, was so large that a few scattered examples, pro or con, are, in themselves, of little probative importance. Only insofar as they may be considered typical do they become significant. The evidence about ex-craftsmen farmers scattered over the country, about farm hands wherever one dips into the census, about Irish, German, and other immigrants herein referred to are strictly typical. Until further tests can be made, however, we cannot be certain that very large numbers of actual industrial wage-earners passed from the eastern cities to the frontier at any given time.

[31] No. 141.

PROFESSOR TURNER'S SEMINAR, JUNE, 1894

This Seminar in western American history met in the Library of the WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY when it was situated in the old Capitol Building. Standing are Emma Hawley of the Library staff, W. B. Overson, Orrin G. Libby, E. F. Dithmar, Joseph Schafer, C. L. Baldwin, and Florence Baker of the Library taff. Seated are Estelle Hayden, Kate Bucknam, Ada Taylor, Annie Pellow, Dena Lindley, Sadie Bold, Flora Barnes, Professor F. J. Turner, and Catharine Cleveland.

# LITTLE KNOWN FRAGMENTS OF TURNER'S WRITINGS

*By* Fulmer Mood

The bibliography of the writings of Frederick Jackson Turner which has been compiled by Dr. Everett E. Edwards and lately published as a portion of *The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner*[1] lists two items which are all but unknown to students of American history in general and to those interested in the literary output of the master in particular. It is thought that scholars who attend to the manner in which a great talent unfolded itself will welcome their republication at this time.

The first essay reprinted here was originally published in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, New York, 1888. It forms the latter part of the article on Wisconsin in that standard work of reference. The first portion of the article (not here reproduced) deals with the geology, soils, vegetation, and climate of the state, and came from the pen of T. C. Chamberlin, the then newly elected president of the University of Wisconsin. In the annals of the earth sciences, Chamberlin's is a name illustrious by reason of his many and varied contributions to the branch of science in which he specialized. Ever since 1873, when Chamberlin had published the first volume of his magistral work on the geology of Wisconsin—a study of much wider scope than its title would lead one to suspect—his high competence had been generally recognized. It was natural, therefore, for the editors of the *Britannica* to turn to him when casting about for

[1] *The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner, with a List of All His Works Compiled by Everett E. Edwards, and an Introduction by Fulmer Mood* (Madison, 1938), 233-272.

a writer of authority to deal with Wisconsin. One presumes that Chamberlin it was who saw to it that Turner was given the opportunity of composing the historical and economic portions of the article.

Turner's contribution to the *Britannica* falls naturally into two parts. The first and longer section deals topically with population, cities, agriculture, manufactures, lumbering, mines and quarries, fisheries, railways and canals, civil administration, finances, charitable and other institutions, and the system of democratic education. That is to say, Turner provides the reader with a sociologically complete survey of the human stocks inhabiting the state, the modes in which they make their living, the forms of political organization, the wealth and the indebtedness of the community as a whole, and so forth. As far as possible, he cites the most recent figures available. Having thus given a comprehensive cross section of the Wisconsin community of 1885, as a going concern, he then provides in the second section of his essay an historical explanation of how the present condition of affairs has come into being.

Notable in this latter part of the essay is the masterly way in which he traces the social evolution of the Wisconsin community from its primitive beginnings in prehistoric times forward to the complex exfoliation of urban and industrial life in the late nineteenth century. So smoothly and so easily do the sentences of this portion of the article move that one reads them all but unaware of the fact that behind the lucid prose there exists a well-integrated, historical philosophy, characterized by strong devotion to the genetic method of investigation. In this piece Turner wrote with a sharp eye for the principles of selection and proportion. The justice of this observation will be evident to those who examine the essay closely.

This piece should be read as the sequel to, and the natural continuation of, Turner's essay on the fur trade in its earlier form. It must have been written at the latest before he went East to study at the Johns Hopkins university.

The second essay in the present series is but little known. It deals with the frontier. The present writer, for one, does not remember that he has ever seen it cited, except in Dr. Edwards' bibliography and in the Turner-Merk bibliography. The opening paragraphs will be of particular interest because they develop at length the distinction between the European usage of the term 'frontier' as contrasted with the American usage of that term. This point is but briefly treated in the longer essay on 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History.' The shorter essay, here reprinted for the first time, was originally published in *Johnson's Universal Cyclopædia*, New York, 1894. The editor-in-chief of the revised edition of this work of reference was Charles Kendall Adams, president of the University of Wisconsin from 1892 to 1901, but formerly president of, and professor of history in, Cornell university. There can be little hesitation in affirming that it was Adams who commissioned Turner to write the sketch which is now rescued from an undeserved oblivion.

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*Population.*—In 1840 Wisconsin Territory had a population of 30,945. The accompanying table exhibits the population from 1850 to 1880. The State census of 1885 gives the number as 1,563,423. The Federal census of 1880 showed 1,309,618 whites, 2702 coloured, and 3161 Indians. The foreign-born population numbered 405,425, or 30.81 per cent. of the whole, of whom 184,328 came from the German

empire, 66,284 from the Scandinavian countries, and 78,057 from Great Britain and Ireland.

| | Population. | | | Density per Square Mile. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total. | Males. | Females. | |
| 1850 | 305,391 | 164,716 | 140,675 | 5.61 |
| 1860 | 775,881 | 407,449 | 368,432 | 14.25 |
| 1870 | 1,054,670 | 544,886 | 509,784 | 19.37 |
| 1880 | 1,315,497 | 680,069 | 635,428 | 24.16 |

*Cities.*—In 1885 Milwaukee had a population of 158,509; Oshkosh, 22,064; La Crosse, 21,740; Eau Claire, 21,668; Racine, 19,636; Fond du Lac, 12,726; Madison (the State capital), 12,064; Sheboygan, 11,727; Appleton, 10,927; and Janesville, 9941.

*Agriculture.*—By the United States census of 1880 Wisconsin had 134,322 farms, embracing 15,353,118 acres, of which 9,162,528 acres were improved land. Of these farms 122,163 were cultivated by the owners and 12,159 were rented. The State census of 1885 estimates the total number of persons engaged in agriculture at 332,500, and the value of farms and agricultural products at $568,187,288. The produce is estimated approximately as follows:—wheat, 21,000,000 bushels; Indian corn, 37,700,000; oats, 43,000,000; barley, 11,500,000; rye, 2,100,000; potatoes, 11,700,000; hay, 2,300,000 tons; sorghum, 599,000 gallons; apples, 1,671,000 bushels; berries, 71,000 bushels. 29,500 acres of tobacco produced nearly 29,595,000 lb (this is in demand for cigar wrappers). Of cheese nearly 33,480,000 lb were produced, and of butter 36,240,000 lb. There were in 1886 about 389,000 horses, 1,256,000 cattle, 6700 mules and asses, 917,000 sheep and lambs, and 777,000 swine.

*Manufactures, &c.*—Large water-powers are found, chiefly on the Fox, Wisconsin, and Chippewa rivers. In 1885 the value of real estate and machinery used in manufacturing was over $38,000,000; stock and fixtures over $24,000,000; value of manufacturing establishments and their products, $193,700,000. There were about 58,500 men

employed. The lumber, shingles, and lath manufactured amounted to $27,113,000; milling (including all flour manufactured from cereals), $19,870,000; wooden articles, $13,719,000; iron products and manufactured articles of iron, $10,300,000; beer, more than 1,445,000 barrels, valued at $9,081,000 (over 75 per cent. of this coming from the great brewing city of Milwaukee); manufactured articles of leather, $8,629,000; waggons, carriages, and sleighs, $4,678,000; paper, $2,804,000; woollen fabrics, $613,000; cotton fabrics, $556,000. The census of 1880 valued the slaughtering and meat-packing product at about $6,534,000 and agricultural implements at $3,742,000.

*Lumbering.*—The proximity of Wisconsin to the prairie States renders its lumbering interests especially important. In 1886 the total forest area of the State was 17,000,000 acres, or 48.8 per cent. of the whole area. According to the census of 1880, Wisconsin was exceeded only by Michigan and Pennsylvania in the value of its lumber product. Operations are chiefly carried on along the Menomonee, Peshtigo, Oconto, Wolf, Wisconsin, Yellow, Black, Chippewa, Red Cedar, and St Croix rivers; but the rapid increase in railroads has opened the northern forests very generally. The lumber, shingles, and lath manufactured amounted to about 3,323,390,000 feet in 1885.

*Mines and Quarries.*—In 1880 Wisconsin ranked sixth among the iron-producing States, but since then its importance has increased. The most extensive iron deposits occur in the Huronian formation in the Menominee region, and along the Montreal river. In 1882 the total product of the Menominee region was 276,017 tons; the Montreal range, divided between Wisconsin and Michigan, about a dozen miles south of Lake Superior, has just been opened up, and there is a rich deposit of Bessemer ore. In 1886 the product of the whole range was about 800,000 tons. The lead and zinc region lies in the south-west of the State; production had been declining, but recently new discoveries have revived it. There is a rich supply of building-stone; limestone quarries are most numerous, but the red-brown sandstone of

Bayfield county and the granite of Marquette county are especially valued.

*Fisheries.*—The white fish and lake-trout fishing industries of Lake Michigan and Lake Superior are extensive, and the inland lakes[1] and streams abound in bass, pike, pickerel, sturgeon, and brook-trout. A State fisheries commission annually stocks the waters with brook-trout, white fish, and pike.

*Railways and Canals.*—There were in Wisconsin in June 1886 4576 miles of railway. The leading lines are the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St Paul; the Chicago and North-Western; the Chicago, Minneapolis, St Paul, and Omaha; the Milwaukee, Lake Shore, and Western; and the Wisconsin Central. A canal connects the Fox and Wisconsin rivers at Portage, and the Sturgeon Bay Canal unites Green Bay and Lake Michigan.

*Administration, &c.*—The State, which is divided into sixty-eight counties, is represented in the Congress of the United States by two senators and nine representatives. The supreme court is composed of a chief justice and four associate justices; there are fourteen judicial circuits, each with a judge; and besides these are county and municipal judges and justices of the peace. The State legislature, composed of the senate (33 members) and the assembly (100 members), meets bienially [*sic*].

*Finances.*—The value of all taxable property of the State for the year 1886, as determined by the State board of assessment, was as follows:—personal property, $114,922,900; city and village lots, $110,564,625; lands, $271,019,627; total assessed value of all property, $496,507,152. Taxes were as follows:—State tax, $241,137; county taxes, $2,590,375; town, city, and village taxes, $7,835,385. The total indebtedness of the towns, cities, villages, and school districts in 1885 was $6,848,123; total indebtedness of counties, $1,569,444; bonded debt of the State, $2,252,000.

*Charitable, Reformatory, and Penal Institutions.*—The State supports two hospitals for the insane, containing to-

[1] There are about 3000 square miles of clear-water lakes.

gether 1141 inmates in 1885, while there are 1240 insane in county asylums, jails, and poorhouses. The school for the deaf has an attendance of 205, school for the blind, 62; industrial school for boys, 292; industrial school for girls, 268; State prison school, 443; a school for dependent children has just been established. The whole number of prisoners in all places of confinement during 1885 was 19,829, and in reformatories 771. The State board of control and the board of charities and reforms have charge of these institutions.

*Education.*—The State makes liberal provision for its public schools; it sets apart as a permanent fund the Federal grant of section 16 in each township, with 500,000 acres of land, and 5 per cent. of the proceeds of the sale of public lands in the State, together with less important items. In 1886 there were still 103,130 acres unsold, and the amount of the fund at interest was nearly $3,000,000. This school-fund income, which in 1887 was $341,289, is supplemented by a State tax of one mill on the dollar, which amounted to $896,138; the combined amount is annually apportioned among the counties, towns, villages, and cities in proportion to the number of children in each of from four to twenty years of age; in their turn the counties must levy upon each town, city, and village a tax equal to their proportion of the combined school fund and State mill tax. The total receipts from all sources for school purposes in 1886 was $4,192,962, and the disbursements $3,184,958. In the same year there were 556,093 persons of school age. Of these 59.4 per cent. were enrolled in the public schools. The enrolments in normal schools and university (2481), in colleges, seminaries, and academies (1131), and in private schools (14,164) made the total enrolment over 350,000. In 1879 attendance at a public or private school for at least twelve weeks each year was made compulsory on all children between the ages of seven and fifteen years. Women are eligible to all school offices, except that of State superintendent of public instruction. In 1888 there are 137 free high schools, receiving special aid from the State. Provision is made for the education of teachers by the five normal schools. The leading denominational colleges are Beloit, Ripon, Milton, Racine, and

Lawrence university. The public school system is crowned by the State university at Madison, organized in 1848. It derives its support chiefly from an annual State tax of one-eighth of a mill on the dollar. The total regular income of the university in 1886 was $105,000; the attendance in 1887 was 600. Connected with the university are a teachers' institute lectureship and farmers' institutes held in different portions of the State, as well as over sixty accredited high schools.

The State historical society at Madison, the capital, has a reference library of 125,000 volumes and pamphlets, and is the richest in the nation upon the history of the Mississippi basin; the State law library there has 19,000 volumes, the university library 14,500, and the city library 9000. Milwaukee has a public library of 35,000 volumes.

*Antiquities and History.*—The State is noted for its exceptionally large number of animal mounds, the work of the 'mound-builders.' They are found along rivers and lake banks, and are from 2 to 6 feet high, sometimes 200 feet long; remains of prehistoric circumvallations, with brick baked *in situ*, have been found, and the largest collection of prehistoric copper implements has been made in this State. Wisconsin was the meeting ground of the Algonkin and Dakota Indian tribes. Its water system connecting the Great Lakes and the Mississippi made it the keystone of the French possessions in Canada and Louisiana. The genesis of Wisconsin was from the fur trade. French explorers, ascending the Ottawa, crossed to Lake Huron, whence they easily passed through the Straits of Mackinaw to Green Bay, thence up the Fox to the portage between it and the Wisconsin, and on to the Mississippi. In 1634 an agent of Champlain, Jean Nicolet, first of recorded white men to reach Wisconsin soil, ascended the Fox a considerable distance. In 1658-59 Radisson and Groseilliers, two fur traders who afterwards induced England to enter the Hudson Bay region, passing along the south shore of Lake Superior, struck southward to the tributaries of the Mississippi. Radisson's journal describes a great river visited by him, which was probably the Mississippi. In 1665 Father Claude

Allouez founded a Jesuit mission at La Pointe, and in 1669 the mission of St Francis Xavier on the shores of Green Bay. Louis Joliet, leaving Quebec under orders to discover the South Sea, in 1673, took with him Father Marquette from Mackinaw, and reached the Mississippi by the diagonal waterway of the Fox and Wisconsin rivers. In 1679 La Salle, accompanied by Father Hennepin, passed along the western shore of Lake Michigan to the Illinois, and in the next year Hennepin, ascending the Mississippi, met Du Luth, who had reached it by way of the western extremity of Lake Superior. Thus were traced out the bounds and principal river-courses of Wisconsin. The epoch of the fur trade followed, during which stockade posts were erected at various key-points on the trading routes; they became dependencies of Mackinaw, long the emporium of the fur trade. In the French and Indian war of 1755-60 Wisconsin savages served under Charles de Langlade against the English at Braddock's defeat and elsewhere. Near the middle of the 18th century De Langlade and his father had established a trading post at Green Bay, which afterwards became a fixed settlement; at the close of the revolutionary war Prairie du Chien, at the mouth of the Wisconsin, grew into a like settlement; and towards the close of the century Milwaukee, La Pointe, and Portage became permanent trading posts. The British garrison that was sent in 1761 to hold Green Bay left at the outbreak of Pontiac's war, and did not return. In the revolutionary war Wisconsin Indians under De Langlade supported the British. England having retained Mackinaw despite the treaty of 1783, American domination was not practically felt by the Wisconsin traders until after the war of 1812. In this war they favoured Great Britain, and in 1814 the latter wrested Prairie du Chien from an American detachment. But the formation of Astor's American Fur Company to deal in this region was followed by a United States law excluding English traders, which resulted in an increase of American influence. At the close of the war the United States placed forts at Green Bay and Prairie du Chien. By the ordinance of 1787 Wisconsin had been a part of the territory north-west of the river Ohio; in

1800 it was included in Indiana Territory, whence in 1809 it passed to Illinois Territory, and in 1818 to Michigan Territory. In 1825 the lead-mines in south-western Wisconsin, which had been known from the earliest days of French exploration, and had been worked by the Sacs and Foxes and by Winnebagoes, attracted a considerable mining population. Hostilities with the Winnebagoes followed, resulting in the cession by the latter of the lead region, and the erection of Fort Winnebago in 1828 at Portage. In 1832 occurred Black Hawk's War, occasioned by the refusal of a Sac band to remove beyond the Mississippi from Illinois, in accordance with treaty stipulations. Pursued by regulars and Illinois militia to the head-waters of Rock river, the band fled across south-western Wisconsin to the Mississippi, where they were nearly exterminated. This expedition disclosed the rich farming lands of the region. In 1836 Wisconsin Territory was formed. Before this the fur trade and lead-mining had been the chief factors in development, but a wave of land speculation and immigration reached here at this period. In 1840 there was a population of 30,945, more than double that of four years before. On August 9, 1846, Congress authorized Wisconsin to form a State government. The constitution framed in 1846 being rejected by the people, a second one was ratified in 1848, and Wisconsin became a State on May 29 of that year.

At an early period the State adopted the policy of attracting immigration by cheap lands, a work in which the railroads have greatly aided, with the result that Wisconsin has the remarkable portion of persons of foreign parentage indicated above. There are whole communities of the same foreign nationality,—such as the German groups along the shore of Lake Michigan, the Scandinavian in various localities, the Swiss colony of New Glarus, the Belgians in Door county, and many others. The recent development of lumbering has rapidly built up northern Wisconsin, a process now being accelerated by the mining interests on the Montreal range. Wisconsin furnished to the Union armies in

the civil war over 91,000 men, the famous Iron Brigade being chiefly from that State. (F.J.T.)

[*Encyclopædia Britannica,* 1888]

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Frontier: in general, the boundary that separates contiguous states; in a more restricted sense, employed especially in the U.S., the term indicates those outlying regions which at different stages of the country's development have been but imperfectly settled, and have constituted the meeting-ground of savagery and civilization.

The consideration of frontiers in the former and more common acceptation of the term has given rise to important questions of political science which have been answered in various ways at different periods of the world's history, and in Europe, where densely populated states abut on each other, the subject of boundaries has always been one of special significance. Publicists have discussed the questions whether there are 'natural frontiers' within which a nation should restrain its activity; how the lines are to be drawn along rivers, lakes, straits, and mountains marking the frontiers; how changes of these natural boundaries affect the respective states; and whether frontiers should correspond rather with race boundaries than with 'natural frontiers.' The growth of the spirit of nationality, the distinguishing feature of modern political history, has tended to lessen somewhat the importance of physical lines of demarkation as compared with racial boundaries, thus sacrificing in many instances the geographic unity of a state to its ethnic unity. The same spirit, moreover, has striven steadily against the attempts of the powers to mark the frontiers in accordance with dynastic interests to the disregard of the racial unity of their subjects or citizens. Even the Congress of Vienna in 1814-15, with its excessive respect for the theory of legitimacy, reveals in many of its territorial arrangements the strength of the principle of nationality in determining the proper frontiers; and subsequent readjustments of the map of Europe have proved that this principle has been steadily gaining ground. The

modification of means of intercourse and of the arts of war has diminished the importance of former natural frontiers from the point of view of offense and defense; and the enunciation of the doctrine that the state should coincide with racial rather than with topographic boundaries has afforded at least a pretext for ignoring old-time division-lines. But in any case it is desirable to have a definitely marked physiographic frontier instead of an artificial boundary-line. As a general principle it may be said that wherever a given population have an essential unity of interest, whether arising from topographic facts, race identity, or social and economic considerations, there is a strong tendency to political unity; therefore the 'natural frontier' is that which bounds a people of fundamentally identical interests.

Writers on international law have laid down the principle that when the frontier of a state is formed by a natural water-barrier, not marked by a definite line along this barrier, the gradual accretions from fluvial deposit accrue to the state along whose boundary they form. But when a river or lake suddenly transfers its channel entirely within the territory of one of the states bounded by it, the boundary remains along the former river-bed. Publicists have also declared that where a boundary follows mountains or hills the water-divide constitutes the frontier. Where it follows a river, the boundary is determined by a line running through the middle or along the center of the deepest channel of navigable streams, provided there is no positive proof that the entire river-bed belongs to either of the contiguous states. The same principle applies to lakes. See Hall, *International Law*, §§37-38.

In the U.S. the frontier is not a fortified boundary-line separating populous States, but by common usage implies the outskirts of civilization, the regions but partially reclaimed from savagery by the pioneer. In the reports of the U.S. census the frontier-line has been defined as the inland line limiting the area which has an average, county by county, of two or more inhabitants to the square mile. This area is called the settled area. Between this census frontier-line and the Indian country the belt of territory sparsely occupied by

Indian traders, hunters, miners, ranchmen, backwoodsmen, and adventurers of all sorts, constitutes the traditional frontier. In the course of American history the frontier has been advanced steadily westward, and in its advance settlement has also widened out N. and S. along its flanks. The continuity of the settlement has been broken by passing over certain regions which have remained to be occupied later; thus the less desirable regions of the Appalachian Mountains and of the Rocky Mountains were left isolated, and regions occupied by Indians, as well as the Great Plains, were left behind the general advance. In this advance of the frontier successive waves of industrial life have crossed the continent, and these waves have corresponded to the stages of the economic progress of society. The Indian traders and hunters, exploiting the fur-bearing animals, worked their way from the Atlantic coast along the rivers and lakes, until as early as 1830 they were traversing the passes of the Rocky Mountains, while the farmers were still near the mouth of the Missouri. The hunter life was followed by the pastoral life of the cattle-raiser, or in the mountainous region by the miner's activity. The pioneer farmers (whose earliest representatives merged with the previously mentioned classes) came next and cleared the land and used up the virgin soil of the prairies with unrotated crops and careless farming.

Statistics for determining the settled area in the colonial period are lacking, but at the date of the first census in 1790 the settled area was bounded by a line which ran near the coast of Maine and included New England, except a portion of Vermont and New Hampshire, New York along the Hudson and up the Mohawk for some distance, Eastern and Southern Pennsylvania, Virginia, well across the Great Valley, and the Carolinas and Eastern Georgia.

By the census of 1820 the settled area included Ohio, Southern Indiana and Illinois, Southeastern Missouri, and about half of Louisiana. The continuity of this area was interrupted by Indian tribes, the management of which now came to be an important question. The frontier region of the time lay along the Great Lakes, where Astor's company operated in the Indian trade, and beyond the Mississippi, where

the Indian trade extended to the Rocky Mountains, and in the Florida country. The Mississippi was the scene of typical frontier settlements. By the middle of the century the Indian region proper lay along the eastern boundary of what is now the Indian Territory, Nebraska, and Kansas. Minnesota was still a region of frontier conditions; but for the most typical frontier conditions at this period one must look to the settlements of California, where the gold discoveries had sent a sudden tide of adventurous miners to the Oregon territory and to the Mormon settlements in Utah. As the advance of the frontiersman beyond the Alleghanies had caused the rise of important questions of transportation and internal improvement, so now the settlements beyond the Rocky Mountains needed means of communication with the East. Accompanying the creation of these arose the settlement of the region of the Great Plains and the development of still another kind of frontier life. Railroads fostered by land grants sent an increasing tide of immigrants into the far West, the U.S. army fought a series of decisive Indian wars in Minnesota, Dakota, and the Indian Territory. By 1880 the settled area had been pushed into Northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, along Dakota rivers and in the Black Hills region, and up the rivers of Kansas and Nebraska. The development of mines in Colorado had sent isolated frontier settlements into that region, and Montana and Idaho as well were being settled. The superintendent of the census for 1890 reports that the settlements of the West lie so scattered throughout the entire region that there can no longer be said to be a frontier-line.

The hardships of frontier life conduced to an energetic and self-reliant spirit among the pioneers which has had a great influence upon the national life and character. In spite of the lawlessness that has marked these border communities, the necessary result of the rude conditions surrounding them, this influence has had no small share in developing the practical ability and inventiveness of the people.

F. J. Turner.

[*Johnson's Universal Cyclopædia*, 1894]

# FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER, HISTORIAN*

*By* AVERY CRAVEN

IN 1904, eleven years after the presentation of his essay on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Frederick Jackson Turner wrote:

> The American physical map may be regarded as a map of potential nations and empires, each to be conquered and colonized, each to rise through stages of development, each to achieve a certain social and industrial unity, each to possess certain fundamental assumptions, certain psychological traits, and each to interact with the others, and in combination to form that United States, the explanation of the development of which is the task of the historian.[1]

In these words Professor Turner stated his conception of the full scope and character of American history and outlined the task which he and other historians of the United States should try to perform. Obviously he was speaking of the map before settlement had begun and was asking What? and How? and Why? of every change in the transformation of its simplicity into the complexity of his own day. It was a large order. It would require the historian to become again geographer, anthropologist, sociologist, psychologist, economist, and political scientist. It would demand that he make sure of the trees and then survey the forest.

* This paper was read at a joint session of the American Historical Association and the Mississippi Valley Historical Association at Chicago on December 30, 1941. The program was devoted to Frederick Jackson Turner and the "frontier hypothesis" which he advanced. Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, dean of the Graduate School at the University of Minnesota, presided, and Professor Craven and Dr. George W. Pierson of Yale presented papers. Since Turner's chief work was done while he was teaching at the University of Wisconsin, this Magazine is especially happy to present Professor Craven's paper with this number and Dr. Pierson's in an early issue.

Professor Craven teaches American history at the University of Chicago. He was a student of Professor Turner's at Harvard University and later associated with him at the Huntington Library. Professor Craven has made many contributions to the literature of American history. His latest book is *The Coming of the Civil War* (1942).

[1] "Problems in American History," in *The Significance of Sections in American History* (New York, 1932), 8-9.

This conception of the American historian's task is all-important in any appraisal of Frederick Jackson Turner and his work. It determined the form, the character, and even the quantity of what he wrote. It was his idea of the job to be done and his formula for doing it. His essays elaborate its phases, and his larger works are drawn according to its specifications. Only through a clear understanding of its full import can we judge what Turner was trying to do and how well he succeeded.

The first thing to be noticed about this conception is its astonishing breadth and its all-inclusive character. It begins by requiring a knowledge of the several raw and varied geographic areas which served as environments and foundations for settlements made by different groups of people with differing social-economic-political habits and institutions. It then asks for a thorough understanding of the processes and stages by which societies, more or less simplified by expansion, again achieved a "certain social and industrial unity" in these environments which provided different kinds of climate, resources, and topography, and which were alike only in the fact that they were raw and unconquered. This would entail, of course, a careful study of the interplay of cultures and environments, and an equally careful analysis of social-economic evolution. It suggests, at least, a comparison of area with area, and most certainly demands the ability to grasp the threads of unity which tie simple frontier beginnings to the complex maturity achieved in varying degrees in the historian's own day. It then asks for a clear understanding of the "fundamental assumptions" which each section or province ultimately made—meaning, I presume, its political, social, and economic philosophies and ideologies. This would, in turn, require some inquiry into the characteristics, the thinking, and the outlook of individual Americans

in each section, perhaps even an effort to point out common American traits and values.

With this much accomplished, the historian would then be ready to face his real task—that of tracing the ways in which the sections, "potential nations and empires," interacted to each other and developed in the course of some three centuries into a single nation possessed of a national economy and culture and capable of playing its part in world affairs.

The second thing about the Turner formula is the idea of unity in the whole American story. His was an organic conception. He did not break American history into periods or treat its various expressions as separate themes. He viewed it all as a progressive development in which frontier simplicity, accepted anew to a degree with each advance, gave way by stages to mature complexity and in which the sections so formed adjusted themselves to the necessities of national life largely through political agencies. The story had unity even though it was one of constant change, and the course of development was orderly enough to suggest "a huge page in the history of society."[2]

The same was true of the different phases of development. Diverse economic, social, and intellectual elements were ever present in such a process, but they did not represent separate strands. Instead they formed a single living, moving stream of forces, shaped and routed by the banks of physical environment but perfectly capable of bursting those banks and finding new courses on new levels. Movement from place to place, growth from stage to stage, adjustment from environment to environment, and ultimate adaptation to national necessities were experiences common enough to all things American to leave something of a common impress

[2] *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1921), 11.

upon them, to give a native flavor to men and habits and institutions. To understand the final American expression in any line required a thorough knowledge of all the differing forces and factors which worked together to shape and condition its development from early to late, from East to West.

It is needless to say that a historian with such a conception of his task as this did not produce many volumes and that what he wrote was not the old-fashioned narrative of events strung along in chronological order. Turner could not make clear why things were as they were nor reveal the complexity of forces back of them by such methods. He had to investigate an enormous number of subjects, compile endless maps and charts, before he could write a single paragraph of the kind of history he wrote, for he could use only those things which symbolized the whole and which indicated general drifts. He was not concerned with facts for their own sake; he was interested only in their meaning, in the light which they shed on the larger social evolution. He had to know all about a given situation before he knew what it meant, but having found out, that situation took its place in the larger movement of events; it had importance only as part of that which was permanent. Thus after long and thorough investigation Turner usually ended up with only a few suggestive paragraphs, a few generalized descriptions of the sections, and a brief synthesis of social evolution in them. But these paragraphs were freighted with ideas which illuminated nearly every phase of that transformation of a map of potential nations and empires into the reality of a United States.[3]

Turner began his efforts to explain the development of the United States by assuming that its history up until his

[3] Carl Becker, "Frederick Jackson Turner," in Howard Odum, ed., *American Masters of Social Science* (New York, 1927), 273-318.

own day was, in large degree, the history of western colonization. Its central theme was the steady movement of men and institutions into raw geographic areas, their adjustment to environments and environments to them in the development of complex city and national life out of primitive social-economic beginnings. "The peculiarity of American institutions," says Turner, "is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people." This recurring "adaptation to changes" was, to his thinking, the significant thing. By it something new in flavor and sometimes form was added to men and institutions. Repeated over and over again in crossing the continent, it became a great force or influence, a process by which things old and environments new turned out the American patterns.[4]

Turner used the term "frontier" as men of his day used it to refer to any border country where men were few and nature dominated and where the first crude steps were being taken to reverse that situation. In America the border was both a place or line and a social-economic stage or state of development. The ideas were inseparable and covered by a single term. And since the whole situation was in motion, the line and the stage of society advancing together but leaving a maturing society where they had been, the process itself as part of general American experience became a historical factor which could be discussed without confusion under such a title as "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." When one deals with "significance," "flavors," "dominant forces," etc., terms need to be "elastic," and "sharp definition," as Turner remarked, is not necessary.[5]

[4] *Frontier in American History*, 2-3.
[5] *Ibid.*, 3, 126, 206.

Then having suggested an approach to American history, Turner viewed the various frontiers and ex-frontiers as sections and sought to interpret the national story in terms of sectional adjustment. Each section, he noted, had its peculiar interests and its own approach to national problems. Each produced its own spokesmen; each demanded of the central government the kind of legislation that would best serve its peculiar needs. The larger fact of age and youth in sections and of continuing frontier expansion made possible the combination of section with section on the basis of sacrificing lesser interests for advantages in major ones. Leaders anxious for national success constantly faced the problem of holding their own section and, at the same time, winning support in other sections. The conflicts and compromises which characterized the national political life throughout its course was thus explained.[6]

The so-called "Middle Period" of American history to which Professor Turner gave his main attention was especially marked by conflict and adjustment of sections. That was why it attracted him. Expansion kept the questions of land and finances, markets and ways to market ever in the foreground. The struggle for institutional dominance in new geographic areas sharpened the conflict over every sectional issue presented. The problem was bluntly one of testing the capacity of American political institutions and practices to expand and contract fast enough to fit both sectional and national requirements without breaking. Could a written constitution and the party system supply enough central efficiency without going to pieces in the face of sectional demands? Did the growth of nationalism require the loss of local democracy? Was loyalty to party strong enough to

[6] This idea is developed in the essay, "The Significance of the Section in American History," in *Sections in American History*, 22-51.

overcome loyalty to section? These were the questions which the Turner approach raised and to which he gave his attention in the two formal volumes of history which he wrote.[7]

But Turner did not stop here. He saw that the whole trend in American life was toward greater complexity and ultimate maturity in social-economic affairs. The frontier came at last to an end even though sectionalism persisted. Somewhere along the line the older regions came of age. Their viewpoint became more national; industry dominated within their borders; urban populations gained the ascendancy; ties with Europe strengthened. The American Civil War definitely marked the triumph of industrial and finance capitalism over agriculture and produced the dominance of the East as a region in economic affairs. The farmers of the South and West were gradually reduced to something resembling a colonial status; free lands disappeared; expansion dwindled. A complex, interdependent society existed widely over areas that were once primitive and simple.

Turner viewed these changes as marking the end of an era in American history. Something had passed. The West and East were becoming more alike, and America was approaching the European patterns. Class interests now tended to take the place of sectional interests; class blocs arose to influence legislation. Yet regional differences due to past experiences still persisted, and sectional consciousness remained. Individual and group traits and assumptions developed under frontier conditions still characterized the actions and thinking of the people. In fact the persistence of old values in a new social-economic order presented one of the major difficulties of the new day. The American mind,

[7] *The Rise of the New West* (New York, 1906); *The United States, 1830-1850* (New York, 1935). R. G. Wellington, one of Turner's students, develops this theme exceptionally well in his *Political and Sectional Influence of the Public Lands* (Cambridge, Mass., 1914).

if we may use that term to describe assumptions and traits, had been conditioned by common experiences on frontiers and on Western farms and by the uncommon experiences in the evolving and conflicting sections. In the new national and international, urban-industrial, frontierless era the rugged individualism, the lawlessness, the wastefulness, and the isolationist-provincialism of earlier days produced only confusion and stumbling. The traditional emphasis on liberty when turned to industry and finance made for economic inequalities which threatened the whole democratic structure. Unless the American could slough off much that past experiences had ingrained into his thinking, serious difficulties lay ahead. Yet in the ability of the American people to preserve sectional values and at the same time achieve national efficiency through national political parties, Turner saw the hope of unity among the nations of the earth. His Western optimism led him to believe that we would solve our national problems and would lead the world to democratic sanity. Most of his fellows thought the same way.[8]

Toward the writing of this American story in detail Turner himself made some contributions. On the frontiers and on the mature United States he wrote only essays and articles, but on the sections and their interplay he wrote essays and two full volumes. In actual quantity the contribution is surprisingly small, but in influence on others and on the writing and rewriting of American history it is unmatched. In this fact lies the first thing to be pointed out in any appraisal of Frederick Jackson Turner as a historian. He was first and always a great teacher both in the classroom and in his writing—a great teacher because he could both stimulate and suggest. Like those of whom he wrote he was fundamentally an explorer. His was the task to open

[8] See essay on "Social Forces in American History," in *Frontier in American History*, 311-34.

lands which others might possess. This was the purpose behind the first great essay on the significance of the frontier. In his own words it aimed "simply to call attention to the frontier as a fertile field for investigation and to suggest some of the problems which arise in connection with it." He was not trying to give a complete and all-inclusive hypothesis for the interpretation of all American history or of all frontiers everywhere; he was trying to call attention to a neglected phase of American history, to point out a back-door approach to a subject which his contemporaries insisted on entering always by the well-known and well-understood front door of European germs in American soil. He was trying, he told me only a few weeks before his death, to lay the foundations for an understanding of the sections created by westward expansion and their interaction with each other in forming the United States.[9]

To reduce this first frontier essay to a hidebound thesis separate from the rest of Turner's work; to denounce it for its lack of exactness and its tendency to generalize; to criticize it because it does not contain everything which might conceivably be included in a complete formula for the writing of American history is to miss its whole purpose and value. This was but a starting point, an approach. The end sought was research, not dictation. If certain suggestions were offered as to the things which such an approach might yield, they were not offered in any dogmatic spirit. Turner never dictated findings. "If Turner ever taught anyone anything," says Carl Becker, "it was to examine the sources and reach his own conclusions."[10]

[9] Avery Craven, "Frederick Jackson Turner," in W. T. Hutchinson, ed., *Marcus W. Jernegan Essays in American Historiography* (Chicago, 1937), 252-70.

[10] Letter to Avery Craven, Dec. 1, 1941. Referring to his essay on Turner in *American Masters of Social Science*, Becker says: "I should not now have any reason for revising that article if I were asked to discuss his ideas."

As stimulation and suggestion this essay on the frontier stands as a veritable landmark in American historiography. As an approach it opens new doors; for persons with imagination it offers sound and profitable leads. Viewed as a cold, exact statement of immutable fact the essay has little meaning. Considered as a literal, isolated thesis it does not require even ordinary critical skill to reduce the whole thing to absurdity and to prove that Turner was a very weak-minded amateur. Turner says that the frontier bred both idealism and materialism, nationalism and sectionalism, individualism and coöperation, innovation and conservatism. Any fool can see that these are opposites. Turner talked of the frontier as a place, a line, a region of sparse population, a state of mind, a process, even a flavor. It does not require a Ph.D. to detect the lack of exactness in this and to discover the befuddled brain behind it. Turner spoke of democracy as coming out of the wilderness. Only the most provincial Westerner, entirely unacquainted with the opportunities which the Industrial Revolution brought in every new town and enterprise, could make such claims. Any fluid society is a democratic society. Only the blind partisan could find more of opportunity in free land than in free industry.

Stated in this extreme fashion the problem of evaluating Turner's work is a very simple one. Either we must conclude that he did not have the critical ability of a well-trained modern graduate student or that he knew what he was doing and assumed that his readers would also know. That he did not see fit to alter his first statements after twenty-seven years of training students as critical as Carl Becker, Homer Hockett, George M. Stephenson, and Thomas Abernethy would seem evidence enough that he was talking about something which lay beyond the half-truths and contradictions which seem so apparent on the surface. Furthermore, the

fact that critics always find it necessary first to build up to detect the lack of exactness in this and to discover the their own Turner frontier thesis from a few scattered and very general statements and to interpret it before they can criticize, would certainly suggest the fairness of an effort in the other direction which assumes his intelligence to begin with and then tries to make sense, not foolishness, out of his words.[11]

There was something of the poet and much of the philosopher about Turner. He had the ability to see deep into the meaning of things and the power to catch the universals. This did not weaken his capacity for scientific research nor lessen his interest in details, but it did cause him to emphasize trends and flavors, to attempt to deal with intangibles, to sweep over minor things in the effort to get at the larger truths. This method has its dangers if history is to be viewed as a pure science and not as a mixture of science and art. But if we remember that Turner's studies of the frontier sought to explain how each of the potential nations and empires on the American physical map rose through stages of development to achieve social and industrial unity and acquire certain fundamental assumptions and psychological traits, then we will not be greatly disturbed by a few things overemphasized and a few others overlooked. Back of all effort to catch significance and to reveal the American past as a "huge page in the history of society" we will find a very simple and a very sound conception of American development. We will find even more. We will discover that the real significance of the frontier, whether we view it as a geographic fact or an abstract process, was that it created sections, old ones and new ones, Northern ones and Southern ones, Middle Western ones and Far Western ones, the inter-

[11] See the way this is done by G. W. Pierson, in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History*, 64:449 ff. (October, 1940).

action of which and the combination of which to form the United States make up its history.

Even the most casual examination of Turner's own writing shows the correctness of this position. Nowhere did he work out the full and complete story of the first interactions of a definite group of pioneers and a new environment. His total effort along this line produced three brief essays: the first dealing with the official frontier of Massachusetts Bay; the second with the Old West, composed of the back country of the Thirteen Colonies; and the third with the Middle West.[12] Even these essays were but preliminary surveys. As he said of one of them: "The present paper is rather a reconnaissance than a conquest of the field, a program for study . . . rather than an exposition of it."[13] Yet they do show where Turner placed his emphasis and what use he made of the so-called "frontier thesis" in writing history.

For our purposes let us analyze the essay on the Old West. First we should notice that it deals with a region, not with colonies or states. It brings out the significance of the geographic province in American history and calls attention to the distortions produced by studying a section according to political lines. It emphasizes physical environments—topography and resources especially—and lays heavy stress on the peculiar values, habits, and institutions of the differing groups and nationalities entering these environments. Turner understood that the basic features of any Western society were the result of the materials brought in and that they differed from each other fundamentally on that basis. The frontier or West only altered the New England, or German, or Upland-Southern settlers and settlements by subtle shifts in flavors which he described by such vague

[12] "The First Official Frontier of the Massachusetts Bay," in *Frontier in American History*, 39-66; "The Old West," *ibid.*, 67-125; "The Middle West," *ibid.*, 126-56.

[13] *Ibid.*, 69-70.

terms as "individualism," "democracy," "toughness of fiber," etc. These flavors were not imparted equally, for the stubborn German resisted most of them, and the compact New England settlements kept to their "steady habits" to a discouraging degree. But problems in the West and reactions to them were similar, and soon enough change was effected in most geographic areas to permit divergent groups to work together and ultimately to achieve a sectional interest and outlook. On the question of changes made by migration to the Old West, Turner notes the shift in the New England system of land distribution from groups to speculators and the corresponding weakening of church and town control over individuals. He makes much of the individualism and love of self-government shown by the Vermont "Green Mountain Boys." He notes, with some emphasis, the failure of the aristocratic planters to monopolize the lands of the back-country South. But there is much more, in the main narrative, of pointing out differences between the compact New England settlements, where "Puritan ideals in education, morals and religion" persisted, and the coarser, more varied and individualistic advance into the Piedmont South, than there is of insistence on frontier likenesses.[14] There is not much that takes us back to Turner's first essay on the significance of the frontier until he turns to a summary of the "consequences of the formation of the Old West." Here he calls the region a "fighting frontier" receiving the brunt of French and Indian attack, "a democratic self-sufficing, primitive agricultural society, in which individualism was more pronounced than the community life of the lowlands."

In explanation of these statements Turner merely says: "The indented servant and the slave were not a normal part

[14] *Ibid.*, 69-106.

of its labor system. It was engaged in grain and cattle raising, not in producing staples." It augmented its scanty supply of specie by the sale of produce, secured schools and churches with difficulty, and raised the issue of nativism because of the presence of numerous Germans and Scotch-Irish.[15]

With these brief comments on individual and personal traits out of the way in about two pages, Turner quickly turns to the consideration of this geographic province as a section in coöperation and conflict with the older sections along the coast. This was evidently what he considered important and the thing which he had most in mind. The Old West stimulated the home market, and the internal trade which it brought lessened colonial dependence on Europe and created a truly national economy. Coastal cities grew as peltries and grain, butter and bacon and lard, household manufactures and dried fruits found their way toward the coast. A new interest in internal improvements, and perchance, a desire to better home markets appeared as political issues. To these was soon added the land question when the squatters of Pennsylvania and the Carolinas urged preëmption and the notion of natural rights to land as against the large grants to companies and favored individuals. Turner described the antagonisms which developed between the property-holding class of the coast and the debtor class of the interior: contests over defective or unjust local government in the administration of taxes, fees, lands, and the courts; conflicts over the apportionment in legislatures, over the separation of church and state, and later, over slavery, internal improvements, and party politics in general. He found these clashes to be intimately connected with the political philosophy of the Revolution and with the general

[15] *Ibid.*, 107-9.

development of American democracy. "In nearly every colony prior to the Revolution," he says, "struggles had been in progress between the party of privilege, chiefly the Eastern men of property allied with the English authorities, and the democratic classes, strongest in the West and the cities." In the Revolution itself, Western sectional attitudes contributed to religious liberty and the "secular state with free churches," to the opposition to slavery, to more liberal land laws, cheap money and stay laws, and a general pressure for larger self-government. "The democratic aspect of the new constitutions," he insists, "was influenced by the frontier as well as by the prevalent Revolutionary philosophy."[16]

If I have read this essay correctly, the significant point is that westward movements are worthy of historical interest primarily because they produce sections which differ from each other and from the older sections from which they spring; that the problems of adjustment between antagonistic sections through politics is the key to American history; that change is the significant thing about frontiers and not a certain fixed set of changes.

Turner's other essays and his two major works prove the same point. His interest was in the section, and his frontier studies were preliminary to his effort to understand the interaction of the sections in national life. The segregation and elaboration of a so-called "frontier hypothesis" find no justification in his own writings. In neither of his two books does it appear as a framework or as a central theme. They are careful detailed studies in which all forces are well balanced and in which no section of the nation receives more than its share of attention. I venture to assert that *The Rise of the New West* will retain its place as a sound, scholarly production by the best modern tests long after most of the

[16] *Ibid.*, 110-25.

volumes in the American Nation series have lost their standing and their place on select library shelves. And it will do so because of its firm grip on the fundamental forces which were at work in shaping the nation's course in its period. His *The United States, 1830-1850* is fragmentary and perhaps never should have been published.[17] But again I am certain that its understanding of the processes of social evolution and its handling of intersectional conflict, combination, and compromise are sound and suggestive. In no other work of its scope are the larger trends within the different sections—economic, social, intellectual, and political—so well interwoven and so clearly interrelated. Nowhere else on so broad a canvas has the interplay of sectional interest and national legislation for the period 1830-44 been so clearly set forth. The work is objective according to the best standards; the word "frontier" appears in the index but three times. As an effort to understand the interaction of section with section and to interpret American history in terms of their combination to form a nation this fragmentary work makes a brilliant start.

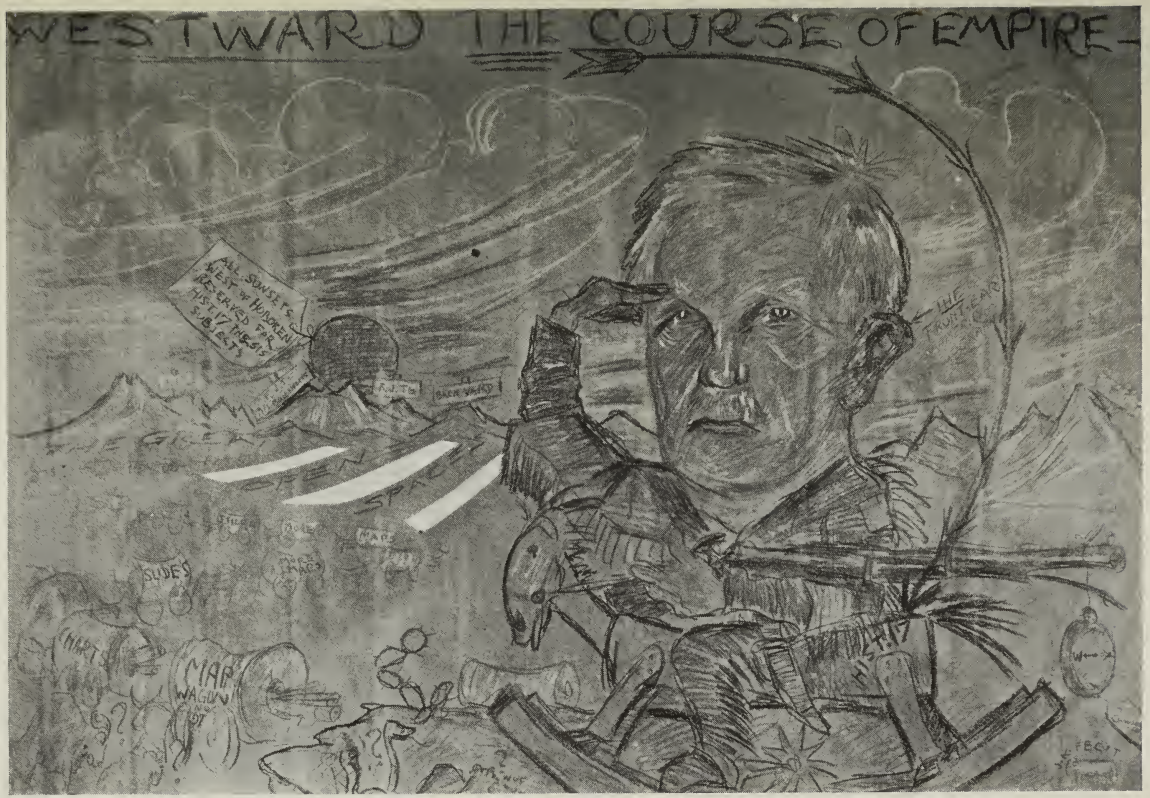
Are there then no weaknesses in the works of Frederick Jackson Turner? Yes, plenty of them as there are in the works of all historians. Without question he drew some conclusions without sufficient evidence—or at least, I hope he did; he overstressed some points and neglected others of equal importance. His generalizations, when carried to the extreme point, are open to all the criticisms justly due generalizations carried to that point. Furthermore, he shared in the enthusiasms and the prejudices of his own day, a day when William Jennings Bryan, you remember, was protesting against the East's neglect of Western farmers. And he

[17] Dr. Max Farrand and the writer hesitated a long time before deciding to publish this book and did so with a clear understanding that it was far from the finished form in which Dr. Turner himself would have let it go to press.

unquestionably revealed his own Midwestern background in his writing; it would take most of the fun out of American history if historians could claim divinity. But the revisionists who examine Turner's work should be careful that they too do not reveal sectional backgrounds and that they do not distort Turner's work and try to make it say things which it never intended to say. Historians should keep words as well as events in their own time and place. They should remember that each age tries to form its own conception of the past in terms of an ever new present. The merit of Turner's work, like that of every other historian, must to some degree be a matter of the emphasis and valuations of his own day. Its soundness as well as its importance must in large measure be gauged in terms of its effect on the men of its own generation. By that measure it stands without a rival. For forty years, says one writer, Turner "has so completely dominated American historical writing that hardly a single production of that time has failed to show the marks of his influence."[18] "American history has been reinterpreted and rewritten because of him," says another.[19] And that influence was not due to the fact that he unearthed new materials and piled up new data on various subjects, although his materials and his data were abundant, but because he could lift happenings out of time and place and reassemble them "in support of some idea" or use them to illuminate some problem. Turner's was not the task of producing narrative history; it was something far more important. It was to go behind events and to seek the whys and hows of things and thereby furnish hints of meanings to a generation and more of plodding historians.

[18] Louis M. Hacker, in the *Nation*, 137:108-10 (July 26, 1933).

[19] Merle E. Curti, in Stuart A. Rice, ed., *Methods in Social Science* (Chicago, 1931), 367.




CARTOON OF FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER

When Professor Turner retired from Harvard University in the spring of 1924, an informal dinner was given in his honor. This drawing by Julius Klein added much to the spirit of the occasion. Cartoon reproduced by courtesy of Mrs. Frederick Jackson Turner.

# American Historians and the Frontier Hypothesis in 1941 (I)*

*By* GEORGE WILSON PIERSON

THE BUSINESS of this paper is to report the results of an inquiry into professional opinion on the subject of a celebrated theory. Just what do American historians now think of the great frontier hypothesis of Frederick Jackson Turner?

Let us be clear before we start that neither the methods nor the conclusions of this investigation will seem to everyone satisfactory. Difficulties have been encountered, both personal and mechanical. For example, your reporter—although once relatively orthodox—today counts himself among the critics of the frontier school of interpretation. Despite precautions, it follows that his own attitudes and prejudices entered into the organization of his inquiry, and will hardly fail to show here and there in the results.

On the other hand, this report is by no means designed for arguing a private point of view. Rather does it represent a genuine attempt to discover and state what we—the historians of America—now think about an exceedingly complicated subject. Instead of a clear-cut, pungently etched profile, a sort of generalized group portrait has been on order. The reader should prepare himself accordingly, for this second defect: because the appeal has necessarily been to multiple authority, the opinions here to be recorded will often turn out disturbingly familiar; on any given point they will seem confused and even contra-

* Dr. Pierson is associate professor of history at Yale University and a leader in the movement to reassess the frontier theory. This paper is based on an informal report, entitled "The Frontier Hypothesis in the Light of Modern Criticism," which was delivered before a joint session of the Mississippi Valley and American Historical Associations, at their annual meeting in Chicago, Dec. 30, 1941. In reorganizing and expanding these remarks for publication, the author had the advantage of a number of thoughtful criticisms and the privilege of permission to quote from the opinions of American historians all over the country. The concluding part of the article will appear in the December issue of this Magazine.

dictory; occasionally our convictions will prove foolish and extreme, yet as suddenly reasonable and sound.

One further word about difficulties. At the start it became clear that we were dealing not with one unknown but with several. For what was Professor Turner's theory about the frontier, in the first instance? Again, which historians are familiar with the frontier and with its interpretation? In any case, how ascertain the opinions of the miscellaneous members of our profession, whether or not they may be accounted competent to judge? The answers given these questions are so important, if the reader is to have any basis for judging the validity of the results, that I take the liberty of describing how the inquiry was organized and conducted.

## The Organization and Conduct of the Inquiry

What is to follow has been based on three distinct, yet complementary pieces of work. In order, these were: (1) a thorough rereading and analysis of the celebrated Frontier Essays, to try to establish what in black and white they really do say;[1] (2) a survey of the controversial literature on the frontier and the frontier hypothesis, particularly in the last ten years; finally, (3) from these materials the construction of a long questionnaire, to be sent out (with a covering letter) to critics and defenders, and to others known to be interested. Under the circumstances, and given the ignorance of the investigator, the coverage could not be complete. As will be seen in a moment, however, a considerable sampling was nevertheless aimed at.

The document, or instrument by which this survey was attempted, presented the following materials: (Table A)[2] a condensed, itemized statement of what the Frontier Hypothesis of the celebrated essays appears to contain; (Table B) a listing of the different criticisms or attacks that have been leveled against the hypothesis; and (Table C) a comparable list of the arguments

[1] The defects of this method—and the reason why it remains, nevertheless, the only nearly satisfactory one—will be made plain in the course of this report.

[2] The tables appear below, at the end of this installment of the article.

known to have been offered in its defense. It will be observed that on each item in each series the victims of the questionnaire were given considerable opportunity to vote.[3] To take care of the possibility that the questionnaire itself might seem too meticulous on the one hand, or too blunt an instrument on the other, the covering letter suggested that "a page of comments on the frontier hypothesis and its critics in the light of your own experience in the field" would be acceptable.

Altogether, the letters were addressed to 220 miscellaneous friends, strangers, and experts. The large nucleus for this list was supplied by Everett E. Edwards' valuable bibliography of writings on the significance of the frontier.[4] A much smaller group of names was supplied by my own investigations, particularly in the bibliographies of contemporary frontiers; of geography, anthropology, and sociology; finally of general or regional American history. Included were also a handful of church historians, professors of law and literature, critics and economists. Requests by specialists, on behalf of younger scholars now investigating particular aspects or phases of our frontier experience, were honored, as far as was possible. Originally, a handful of questionnaires went also to instructors and graduate students in New Haven; as a precaution against the possibility of local bias, however, their replies were later segregated and discarded.

In sum the mailing list included, as I now find, not only most of the obvious names, among them seven former presidents of the American Historical Association, and as many officers now active in our own or affiliated societies, but also in the interest of breadth a number of scholars from allied fields, a small squad of Canadian historians, finally a light scattering of men in, or just released from, graduate training. Because of the criterion of publication, a few proved young, the great majority well

[3] Returns from the supplementary queries, attached to each table, will be discussed in general terms in the second half of this report.

[4] "References on the Significance of the Frontier in American History," United States Department of Agriculture, *Bibliographical Contributions*, no. 25 (2d ed., April, 1939). I am indebted to the author, as to Reed Bain, Frank L. Owsley, Robert E. Riegel, Richard H. Shryock, and Roger Shugg for the suggestion of additional names.

established. Of the lot, some were believed to be hostile to the frontier theory, more known to be friendly, the greatest part not sufficiently identified with either school of opinion to warrant prediction as to the nature of their replies. Answers were requested by December 10. With some trepidation, your reporter sat down to wait.

Almost at once the returns started pouring in. If the early promise of a heavy vote was not realized after Pearl Harbor, it was nevertheless made clear by a comforting number of American historians that they had not abdicated all professional interests with the outbreak of the war. The final tabulation showed useful replies from just under half the field. For various reasons, 114 scholars did not respond.[5] On the other hand, 31 returned the questionnaire with their votes; 25 took advantage of the option and wrote a page—or even five pages—of comment instead; while 50 valiant participants sent in substantial comments or letters *together with* their votes: a total of 106. The immediate statistical impression received was therefore one of marked interest in the frontier hypothesis of Frederick Jackson Turner. And the practical result was the accumulation of an altogether surprising quantity of written opinion. Where I had looked forward to a simple analysis of the three tables of votes, there had now come to hand seventy-five letters (or sets of marginal comments) which

[5] Actually, 7 questionnaires were returned unopened, the intended recipient having recently died or left no forwarding address. If we ignore the possibility that other letters may have gone astray, this reduces our college of electors to 213, our total of non-participants to 107. Of these, 20 wrote acknowledging interest in the investigation but pleading ignorance, or long absence from frontier study, or the press of other duties as excuse. Of the 87 who sent no written reply of any sort, 2 were speakers on the same program, and at least 5 more took advantage of convention opportunities to register observations with your inquirer by word of mouth. Only perhaps 80 of the electors, therefore, took no part at all in this investigation.

The reader should understand that among those not represented in either votes or comments were T. P. Abernethy, Beverley W. Bond, Jr., Isaiah Bowman, Grant Foreman, Dixon Ryan Fox, Carter A. Goodrich, J. B. Hedges, F. Merk, Frederic L. Paxson, Carl Sauer, and a handful of others well known in the field of frontier studies. Fortunately, most of these authorities have already gone on record: their views may be found in print.

If any of these scholars—or any of the silent remainder—encounter these returns, let me urge them still to add their opinions to the instructive file now in the Yale Library. To all who put themselves to such pains, under difficult circumstances, to make the investigation broad and valuable, your reporter wishes to express his gratitude. It may be added that a few copies of the questionnaire are still available. Fifty-nine duplicates have already gone out to 16 individuals for their files, or for trying on graduate students.

also dealt with the contents of the hypothesis, with its validity, and even with reasons why it should not be investigated at all.

Not investigate at all? Strange as the proposal sounds, such was precisely the drift of a number of earnest pleas. In fact, so trenchant and so tenacious in this view have certain members shown themselves that it will be necessary to take account of the phenomenon. Postponing the actual voting returns, accordingly, I venture first of all to report the obstacles that today still appear to stand in the way of a dispassionate reappraisal of Turner's famous hypothesis.

## The Obstacle of Prejudice

The immediate obstacle, without much question, is emotional. Witness the nature of the charges, and the intensity of the feelings that seem to have been aroused.

On the one hand, a handful of resolute teachers greeted the whole inquiry with an almost wolfish pleasure, as giving them at last something tangible to work on: an opportunity to voice their doubts, their dislikes, their long-felt dissatisfactions. Incidentally, it is worth noting also how much of a thesis or dogma, and how hopelessly stereotyped, the hypothesis is now felt by certain historians to be.[6]

> Here is your questionnaire. It is time somebody shot that old hypothesis so full of holes that it will be buried.
>
> In my attempts at teaching I deal with the aspects of westward expansion on their merits, which are real enough. I attempt to explain the Turner formula, not because it seems valid, but because so many people have been hypnotized by it.
>
> Eliminate the lyricism and get down to verifiable evidence.
>
> I think the Frontier needs to be de-glamorized.
>
> The "frontier" has become a stereotype which makes critical examination of it almost impossible; so I have dropped it from my vocabulary.
>
> . . . in terms of the history of scientific thought, *any* monistic explanation of data so complicated as those of American history is *a priori* suspect at the start.

[6] For obvious reasons it has not seemed proper to identify the authors of the more controversial opinions about to be quoted. All but one of the critics, it is fair to say, are scholars of reputation, and in their forties or early fifties. Among the whole body of respondents, at least 75 percent (and perhaps nearly 90 percent) appear to have passed the age of forty.

In many ways, I suspect Turner performed something of a disservice for western history by crystallizing generalizations before an adequate groundwork had been placed.

Turner had something in mind which he felt was inadequate but he never brought himself to think through these inadequacies.

It is my impression that the whole Turner thesis needs a thorough restatement including extensive modifications, but I doubt whether that will be done, without vehement protest, so long as a student of Turner survives. Had he lived long enough, retaining his early vigor, I believe he would have done it himself, but so devoted were his disciples, they they could hardly be expected to do it.

This last attack represents the views of no single individual, and calls attention to a phenomenon of some importance: the tendency of certain devoted pupils and followers to defend the hypothesis *against all attacks,* less because the theory is perfect than because it was Turner's. As one of the more moderate critics put it: "I think a few of the Turner group, blinded by their devotion to their master to the point where even to question him is akin to a personal insult, err when they stand upon his hypothesis as the only possible one, . . ."

However that may be, there can be no question but that an inquiry, designed to elicit opinions on a theory, drew out also an astonishing number of tributes to the author of that theory, to say nothing of caustic comments on the critics (or any criticism) of his work.[7]

Since space forbids complete quotation, I shall limit myself to a few characteristic remarks, and preface these by one of the ablest comprehensive tributes to Turner and to this thesis that it has been my pleasure to encounter.

Turner's thesis served a very useful purpose. It stimulated study and interest in American history, served to differentiate our history from that of other lands, removed the inferiority-complex of the West

[7] Perhaps foreseeing this type of reaction, one kindly Nestor ended his letter with the following beguiling postscript: "Remember, not too much zeal in assailing Turner; understatement is enough."

In general, the defenders of Turner's theory, and of his reputation, are not confined to the Universities of Harvard and Wisconsin, or to any one region, or to any particular age group. They do appear proportionately more numerous in the Middle West, the trans-Mississippi country, and the older groups. Among the distinguished scholars replying to this inquiry in a decided pro-Turner sense were the following: James Truslow Adams, Eugene C. Barker, Merle Curti, E. E. Dale, Max Farrand, B. H. Hibbard, J. D. Hicks, Homer C. Hockett, Roscoe Pound, and A. M. Schlesinger.

and made that section proudly conscious of her immediate past, struck at the intellectual complacency of New England and the romanticism of the South—and, not least, gave to hundreds of young westerners topics for books that they could integrate with their environment. Necessarily the Frontier thesis will have less influence in the future. Although I never went the whole road with Turner, I loved and admired him, and profited greatly from his instruction in the Harvard Graduate School.

There has not been a major work on United States history written in the last twenty years that has not been affected by the Frontier Theory. One can apply it in whole or in part, or to sections or eras of American history, in a variety of different ways; one may emphasize it or depreciate it, limit it in space or in time; the Frontier Theory in some form is with us to stay. Historians may well say of Turner, as Dean Briggs said of President Eliot, "something of him will be a part of us for ever." —S. E. MORISON.

Many others had seen or caught glimpses of various aspects; but Turner was the first to divine (and express) the strength and importance of the great permeating force. . . . —MAX FARRAND.

I think Turner made a distinct contribution by his insistence on the American origins of many of our institutions. Later study of other peoples on our own and other frontiers, especially the French in North America has convinced me that there are certain limitations to the frontier hypothesis in time and place, and the type of frontiersmen.

None the less, I hold Turner and his thinking in high esteem and consider that it would be a disservice to American history to refuse to recognize his contributions.—LOUISE PHELPS KELLOGG. [8]

Turner was kindly, generous, modest. For these reasons he was inspiring. He gave the impression that the best of American history was, largely, yet to be written, and that everyone of a group of workers, large and small, might hope to make genuine contributions. The critics can't hurt him. His name will stand.—B. H. HIBBARD.

And yet, as a whole his philosophy made, and deserved to make, a profound impression upon American history. It will not suffer particularly from the numerous minor criticisms of it that anyone who tries can make. As the cigarette advertisement insists, "It satisfies." —J. D. HICKS.

The attack on the theory is Marxian, eastern-sectional and itself a reflection of the urbanization of our civilization. The European historians have fomented it because they see nothing in American history but a repetition of European developments and tendencies. (By "European historians" I mean specialists in European history.)

I can think of no lines that express my feeling of the Turner critics better than the following:

> "Even such small critics, some regard may claim,
> Preserved in Milton's, or in Shakespeare's name."

[8] See also comment of same scholar, quoted in second part of this report.

On rereading the more vehement comments, *pro* and *con,* your reporter concluded that the old battle—which began so quietly with the republication of the frontier essays in 1920—is still far from ended. As a matter of record, discussions of frontier theory have recently been multiplying; in few of them has it proved possible to remain on a purely disinterested, theoretical level; rather, reference is sooner or later (and normally sooner) made to the master. And the result is heat. Minds tend to close, opinions to harden. Bystanders even weary of the strife. "I have the feeling that the 'frontier' has been chewed too much," comments H. S. Commager. "I wish historians would stop arguing about it and develop some new interpretations. Also I wish they would copyright the idea so as to prevent every literary critic, sociologist, criminologist, etc., etc., from using and abusing it."

## Objections to the Questionnaire—and to Theoretical Analysis

A second difficulty that has stood (and that will continue to stand) in the way of a dispassionate reappraisal of Turner's frontier hypothesis may baldly be summarized as follows: many of us are reluctant to define what the frontier theory was. Perhaps the reasons for this reluctance, and the implications for all inquiries of this sort, may be illustrated by the specific reaction of a number of historians to the questionnaire.

It is betraying no secret to state that this painfully constructed questionnaire gave something less than complete satisfaction. A few confessed a constitutional aversion to all questionnaires—or thought that this particular sample was badly constructed or inadequate. "I don't much like this type of jury investigation. It's a good deal like trying to establish the validity of a scientific finding by a vote of Congress," wrote one very eminent eastern scholar. Another began his letter as follows: "It is impossible to index a fog, but you have done a fair job of it and I have checked, with some twinges of thought and misgivings."

Twinges of thought and misgivings afflicted a considerable number among the respondents, for two further reasons. Quite a group had read the Frontier Essays, or worked on frontier subjects, so long ago as not to feel competent to vote on the details of the hypothesis, or the validity of specific criticisms. It was these scholars who most frequently took advantage of the option, and sent in general statements instead of voting. A few, on the contrary, found they knew the theory and the critical literature so intimately, or had studied the frontier itself so thoroughly, that even the detailed assertions of a long questionnaire seemed too generalized and blunt to be answered without reservations. Hence numerous marginal comments on the document itself. [9]

The warmest and most interesting objections to the questionnaire, however, came from those who (regardless of their views on opinion polls in general) opposed and even resented the application of any such test to Turner or to his work. "This seems to me a subject in which the questionnaire type of investigation is singularly fruitless," protested one candid professor.

Why? The arguments range through a wide arc of opinion and differ perhaps most materially in the degree of definiteness assigned to Professor Turner's original proposals. In successive instances, the questionnaire approach to the frontier theory is objected to because it is held to imply mathematical exactness, because it assumes systemization, because it emphasizes the parts at the expense of the whole, because it tries to measure exactly what was too big and general and masterful to be measured. Turner was a pioneer with the explorer's tendency to find rather than prove. Or the Master was a poet, with the poet's privilege of oversimplification. Or Turner was really a teacher, who wrote and taught less to establish a truth than to inculcate an attitude, indicate an approach. Whatever the explanation, in the opinion of many of his students Turner never intended to formulate a scientific system and never

[9] With the four objections thus far listed, I find myself in instinctive sympathy. Table A, in particular, suffered from excessive condensation. For a fuller exposition of what I believe may be found in the Frontier Essays, see my articles in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 64 (October, 1940), and the *New England Quarterly*, 15 (June, 1942).

pretended to have found one. It follows that the validity of his hypothesis ought not to be judged by the accuracy of any details. A few defenders even go to the point of questioning whether there is, or ever was, a hypothesis in the first place. "Perhaps I have misunderstood Turner all these years," reads a protest from the Southwest. "I have thought that his thesis merely asserts that the Frontier exerted a distinctive influence in American history. Particularizations and illustrative details are hardly more than suggestions."

Much of the argument about Turner proceeds from a mistaken premise, as, it seems to me, does your questionnaire. The term "frontier hypothesis" was not Turner's. He did not presume to have discovered the sole and only key to the interpretation of American history.—J. D. HICKS.

Evidently Turner thought of himself as a pioneer, and it is only fair for us who have come after to take the same view of him.—HOMER C. HOCKETT.

. . . he was the Columbus—if not the first to sight, then the first to chart, the influences of public land in American development.—LOUIS PELZER.

Having discovered what seemed to him a tract of fertile lands or rich gold bearing earth, he stayed just long enough to produce one experimental crop, or wash out a single "poke full of nuggets" in order to be certain that productive soil or gold was really there. He then pointed the opportunities out to others and moved on in search of something else.—E. E. DALE.

There was so much for the pioneer to explore that he never found time to apply the most stringent critical tests to the many hypotheses which sprang up in his fertile brain. I do not think that he was much troubled by apparent lack of consistency, the "virtue of small minds."—HOMER C. HOCKETT.

The frontier thesis is not, nor was it ever intended to be, an all-inclusive interpretation of American history. Hence, it should not be reduced to a simple formula. . . . The thesis should be used in new studies of frontiers as an approach, not as a pattern.—JOHN L. HARR.

I do not think that you will find such precision in Turner, who, as I recall him, used his hypothesis to illuminate rather than to classify.—W. A. MACKINTOSH.

The influences—democracy, independence, individualism, Americanization were sound inferences—not statistically provable, but not disprovable, provided not too much is claimed too literally.

I think I must say that the influences which Turner attributed to the frontier, it did have in general; that is, the frontier stimulated, hastened,

and no doubt modified developments which other influences would have brought about with no very essential differences.—EUGENE C. BARKER.

How far this last line of reasoning may lead historians must begin to be plain.[10] But we have yet one more argument to face: the objection to theorizing and to the study of historical philosophy on any occasion. Clearly implicit in certain replies, as well as in the attitude of many historians attending the Chicago session, was the conviction that if the hypothesis has outlived its usefulness it ought to be (and in fact will be) replaced only by a new theory. "It is not a theory to be proven or disproven." Theoretical analysis and the philosophical approach are scorned as destructive and unscholarly. As one distinguished admirer puts it, "I confess that the whole criticism seems to me utterly futile. It will never contribute an idea as fruitful as the essay of 1893."[11]

Finally, one supporter quotes Turner's "Autobiographical letter" to Constance L. Skinner in defense of himself:

> "The Frontier and the Section . . . I recognized . . . as *parts* of American history—only *parts,* but very important ones. However, I have not conceived of myself as the student of a region, or of any particularly exclusive 'key' to American history. I have tried to make some changes in the perspective, and as a pioneer, with others, I have found it necessary to talk a good deal upon these aspects. But it is in American processes I have been interested."

This last defense presents the case in its best light, and underlines once again the danger of applying a technique of exact analysis to

[10] "There has been much talk of a more or less loose nature about the 'Turner theory' or the 'Turner hypothesis'. Frankly, I do not believe that there is any such thing." So writes one of Turner's pupils who knew him best.

After ably restating "Turner's ideas as I understand them," this same pupil reconciles the apparent contradiction in his own remarks by concluding: "To me this is not a thesis, but a series of facts. I have seen all of these things during more than a half century of life in a new country such as Oklahoma, which in my own life has grown from the picturesque wildness of the early days to the equally picturesque wildness of present days."

[11] "Let me illustrate the objections of some historians by citing the reactions of two to this synopsis. One, who studied under Turner, remarked in effect that 'Turner wasn't here,' not the Turner of the seminar who became incredibly dogmatic when his theory is put in synopsis. For him there are three Turners—the teacher, the historian, and the essayist-philosopher; they cannot be separated, however, and the kindly man is forever bound up with all his works. The other historian complained of 'all this scholasticism' as 'parasitic' when, theory or no theory, the story of the building of the West remained to be written from the sources. His attitude represents the common American aversion to theory and philosophy. But it also shows that to consider Turner is to become involved in sectional politics (cf. the late Schafer vs. Goodrich and Davison). In such circumstances no statement of Turner's theory can be regarded as 'faithful'."

an inspirational set of essays. By admitting the soft impeachment of poetic exaggeration (an exaggeration, incidently, that might be shown to have been valuable in its day), the defenders of Turner's work can perhaps protect the hypothesis from being interpreted or criticized too literally. After all, was not the hypothesis a device, rather than a theory? [12]

At this point your reporter begs leave to intrude two personal opinions. The first is that Turner had *both an enthusiasm* for the western frontier *and a theory* about that frontier. He said the frontier was important. And again and again he then said also *how* it was important. These "suggestions" were definite and were maintained pretty steadily over a whole lifetime. If anyone doubts this, let him look again at the famous Frontier Essays. Or let him merely ask himself whether he ever drew from these essays (or from Professor Turner personally) the impression that the frontier made Americans conservative, that so much free land degraded the art of farming, or that preoccupation with the frontier prevented attention to economic legislation and social improvement? Hardly, for the hypothesis and the master taught quite different views.

My second observation is this: it is the admirers of Turner the man, Turner the grand teacher, Turner the inspiring master —I find it is the admirers and not the critics—who do the author of the frontier hypothesis the disservice of claiming that he held no serious theory. Doubtless this attitude springs in part from the tendency of both critics and disciples to state the theory in downright and unqualified terms. Yet the results seem no less unfortunate. To protect the memory of the man, certain defenders either abandon a celebrated fraction of his work altogether, or else reduce it to mere atmosphere, mere Western flavor. One critic of the frontier school objects to this

[12] One able mediator from the Middle Atlantic region puts this argument as follows: "He [Turner] spent his life in stimulating students to engage in research projects in the new field which he charted. I do not believe that he ever thought of himself as presenting a complete and final word. He was only anxious to get more of a different type of work done. In this he succeeded very well."

latter type of diminution in terms to which many of Turner's followers themselves will say *amen:*

> "Western flavor," be it added, apparently must be felt, not defined, and this stress upon vagueness is rightfully to a Turner critic an element of weakness. To the Turnerite, however, it is a bulwark of strength for it permits him to say,—'Turner never meant that'; 'Turner made allowances for that,' or 'if you had been in Turner's classes you could not make such an absurd statement about his hypothesis,' etc. etc. I have always been impressed by the impossibility of pinning an ardent Turnerite down. He always evades with some such expression as those given above. This loyalty, I judge, is good evidence of Turner's winning personality and inspiration as a teacher, although it leaves those who are eager to know just what he taught, just what his hypothesis and its limits are, just where it may be vulnerable, with a sense of futility as though they were sparring with a wraith. If one can believe devoted students of Turner, he apparently approached omniscience by his talent for foreseeing, and having an answer to, all the criticisms which would be levelled after his death against his hypothesis.

However that may be, the reader will begin to understand why it is that fifty years after its formulation historians are still not agreed on either the contents or the validity of the celebrated frontier interpretation. Feelings have been too personal and warm; the hypothesis has been too vaguely and too variously understood; theorizing and logical analysis have alike been deprecated in our profession. What such attitudes have meant in this investigation, and must mean for the study of other philosophies or problems in causation, invites reflection.

Fortunately, I am now able to report that such obstacles in the way of frontier reappraisal are not insuperable. On the contrary, according to the questionnaire returns an impressive majority of American historians are persuaded that Turner's hypothesis did contain elements beyond the mere proposition that the frontier was important. Statistically, three out of every four respondents to this inquiry feel that these elements were clearly enough set down by the master to make a recognizable theory, and one which can be discussed, argued, *and voted on* in detail. If not everyone agrees in regarding the questionnaire as "ingenious in breaking down the discussion of this subject to a point where people will be talking to one another rather than past one another," never-

theless a number of Turner's defenders, in answering the questionnaire, find its analysis close enough to their notions of the original to go along with it item by item and vote each proposition still satisfactory. Let us therefore proceed to the questionnaire itself, and so to the detailed expressions of opinion originally sought by this inquiry.

## What the Hypothesis Is Believed to Contain and How Far It Is Still Acceptable

One glance at the tabulation of the voting shows that, despite the war, and despite all mental reservations as to the pertinence or adequacy of this investigation, on most questions between sixty and sixty-eight votes were cast by the eighty-one participants.[13]

A second glance happily removes the fear that these voters might have failed to distinguish between the elements in the theory—or the arguments over it. On the contrary, certain of Turner's propositions (as restated in our document) appear to have the strong endorsement of a substantial majority, no matter what their allegiance. And other assumptions or arguments as distinctly do not.

For example, if we wish to know what the hypothesis is believed to contain, and how far Turner's propositions are still endorsed, we have but to examine Table A. There, in the fourth and first columns, are registered some decided preferences. By looking for the items most often voted indispensable and acceptable, I make bold to discern the following state of mind.

The majority of the historians voting think of the frontier as having been a zone, a moving zone, containing much free land and opportunity. The effect of this zone was change, the change showing particularly in personal character, in the fostering of individualism, democracy, energy, optimism, inventiveness, coarseness, materialism, idealism, etc., etc.[14]

[13] The apparent discrepancy in Table A is accounted for by the fact that two questions were asked, the fourth column thus representing a second vote for many participants.

[14] I regret not having divided Turner's list of Americanisms so as to make possible discrimination between traits.

Thus far, the majority of modern historians and Turner would appear to be in striking agreement. What is supposed to have been in the theory still seems satisfactory to us. It is worth noting that there is also great support for the view that (both in the theory and in the fact) the frontier was a *line* at the edge of the wilderness. Again, both Turner and his supporters are recorded as defining the frontier in terms of population—though Turner seems to have put more emphasis on economic pursuits, while modern historians stress the sparseness of the populations. On the whole, however, the preference is for the frontier as a zone; *both* the occupations and the density of settlement within this zone are voted important; and, so far as results go, change in the character and attitudes of the people is more essential and noticeable than change in institutions.[15] How closely this analysis meets the ideas of voters and non-voters alike may be gathered from the definitions offered in some of the letters and comments.

His idea was essentially the expansion of population into free land with successive types of "frontiers" overlapping and interpenetrating, but with the first two—(1) trapper-hunter-trader and (2) settler—dominating the later comers by having defined and left behind the basic pattern of American life: individualism, democracy, freedom, opportunity, material mastery, and the development of social structures to implement the realization of this pattern of life—which is at the same time an idea and an ideal.—REED BAIN.

The pertinent elements in the frontier process are motion; fluidity of society; an attempt to re-establish an old way of life in a wilderness environment; adjustment to conditions resulting in change; successive advances from primitive to complex society; and the repetition of the process resulting in the Americanization of men and institutions, as well as in the colonizing of a vast continental area.—JOHN L. HARR.

The abundance of land in relation to the size of the population made for economic opportunity. This provided a fairly solid basis of material well-being, which gave rise to a sense of the worth of the individual, and to the idea of democracy. It also made for individualism in the economic sense (squatter's rights). Contact with primitive conditions produced a practical, utilitarian view of life. The process of construction tended to make people optimistic, forward-looking, and self-con-

[15] With this last distinction, Carl L. Becker seems to disagree. "I feel sure that the central point in Turner's notion was that the frontiers offered an opportunity to study the social process from simple to complex conditions. The central point of his idea about American history was that our institutions and ideas owed more to the conditions of a frontier society than to inheritance from England."

fident. Mobility and adaptability were fostered. Idealism arose as the result of the improvement in the material circumstances of a large number of people, and from the sense of construction in the interests of the common man.—CURTIS P. NETTELS. [16]

The reader will recognize that still a third method of definition, and a useful one, would be by delimitation: the discovery of what the frontier theory, and the frontier itself, were not. Fortunately, this same Table A enables us to list the set of elements which enjoy the least popularity, and are regarded as least essential to the frontier hypothesis itself. For example, if we study the votes in the "discard" column we learn, first of all, that the frontier concept depends very little on its geographic elements. Neither the topography, location, nor resources [17] of the frontier zone are held to be very significant. Again, a striking number of voters seem willing to discard the frontier "defined as the process of changing Europeans into Americans"—as also the claim that American democracy came only out of the forest. The vote that most surprised your reporter, however, was the vote rejecting or doubting the "leap-frog" idea: the proposition that the frontier obtained its great hold on the American mind because the process of pioneering was a repeated experience. Apparently the *habit* of flight from society, the business of breaking for the high timber again and again as the second-comers moved in, and the neighborhood filled up, apparently this most vivid element in the saga of Western settlement is now regarded as more picturesque than

[16] Occasional variations in definition, ranging from poetic approval to pragmatic revision, are represented by the following:

"In the quadrilateral, whose sides were the common man, land resources, transportation, and economic gain, there operated the forces of the American West or frontier. The sides might change but the figure remained to encompass and mold American development."

"By 'frontier' I mean a condition where society is about at its simplest (atomistic), few if any roads, little if any surplus goods except furs, self-sufficing (if so) agriculture, isolation, usually (but not necessarily) Indians to guard against."

[17] Did not Professor Turner put much emphasis on these aspects of the frontier? In the matter of resources, I think some of the voters may have overlooked the connection between resources on the one hand and opportunity, gate of escape, optimism on the other. B. F. Wright goes so far as to suggest that what is keeping the frontier theory alive today is the ease with which "frontier" can be translated into "marvelously rich domain. The strength of the thesis is related only incidentally to the frontier in his original sense (new and thinly settled area, etc., etc.). It is based squarely upon the fact that this was a land of opportunity, the like of which is not elsewhere to be found in modern history."

vital.[18] Is this conviction the result of Turner's having equated "frontier" with "west," thus absorbing non-frontier populations into the classification of pioneers, while at the same time defining frontier area so as to include far more than the edge of settlement? One does not know.

Although a number of interesting deductions can perhaps be drawn from a careful manipulation of this table of votes, I limit myself to one additional set of notes: a list of the points on which historians today seem shaken or doubtful. The second column indicates, if I am not mistaken, that we would now wish to restudy or limit Turner's conviction that the frontier had a marked influence on Eastern and European institutions. Again, we have reservations as to how much the frontier improved our political and economic life. Specifically (and the questionnaire should have included a statement allowing such a vote), the emphasis would probably lie instead on "mobile ascending individuals": on self-improvement rather than on social improvement.[19] Thirdly, historians appear to feel that the sources of our democracy need fresh appraisal. And they are prepared to revise their belief that the frontier was the great gate of escape: the safety-valve.

Let me not be misunderstood on this last point. The voters have not surrendered the frontier as a field of opportunity, as a source of optimism. They merely tend to recognize a distinction between the frontier *as a first,* and *as a last,* resort. No doubt because of the excellent work done by Goodrich, Davison, Shannon, Schafer, Kane, Tucker, and Danhof, they are beginning to

[18] Yet what happens to the similarity between frontiers if frontiers do not repeat each other—to their influence on the population if few individual settlers were exposed more than once?

[19] I am indebted to Everett E. Edwards for emphasis on the frontier "as not only a horizontal but a vertical process." W. E. Shiels and Curtis P. Nettels comment to similar effect. Charles A. Beard puts the matter as follows: "I am convinced from my own studies and illustrations afforded by my ancestors' experiences on the Indiana frontier long ago and by my personal knowledge of pioneers and pioneering that the existence of free land in America and great natural resources and elbow room have had a profound influence on the history of our country and the Western world in general. . . . I have known literally scores of old men and women who went west from the seaboard with little or nothing and found, along with hard work, such liberty and commodious living as the vast masses in Europe or seaboard regions had never enjoyed."

doubt whether our West ever was as much of a safety-valve for the laboring man as has commonly been assumed. Even here, the vote is to restudy, not discard.[20]

## The Major Criticisms of the Hypothesis

Turning now to the table of Attacks on the Frontier Hypothesis, the voting shows with great clarity that not all the criticisms listed are equally impressive and acceptable. Among those that are taken seriously, the emphasis seems to be greatest on the following assertions: that the frontier explanation is too simple and all-inclusive; that the definition of "frontier" is too vague and shifting; that the theory was insufficiently overhauled as time brought new evidence and new ideas to light.

Next in acceptability seem to be the criticisms that revolve around the idea of prejudice or bias. Taking the votes in the first two columns together, there seems to be a very substantial feeling that Turner's theory was (and still is) marred by cultural, regional and patriotic preferences. To many it seems too materialistic, in fact too deterministic; too much occupied with economics, politics, and geography; too little concerned with ideas, education, the arts, and with the whole inheritance and social tradition. In a vote which enforced a doubt already raised in the balloting on the theory itself, a considerable number wholly or in part agreed with the thought that there may have been less invention or originality on the frontier than we have been led to suppose.[21]

[20] "Contemporary evidence leaves no doubt that manufacturers, eastern laborers, and easterners generally, did think of an open West as a 'safety-valve', but that it really was one is open to serious question."

Rufus S. Tucker reports a conversation with Turner, in which Turner said that practically "all of the emigration from New York to the West came from the up-state counties. That is evidence that he did not attach much importance to the theory that urban unemployed settled on the frontier during the depressions."

[21] This vote probably reflects the influence of Benjamin F. Wright, Fox, Riegel, and others—to say nothing of personal failure to discover many enduring variations or novelties on particular frontiers. Perhaps the increasing vogue of economic history has also had an effect.

In general, internal analysis of the balloting reveals that the consistent critics and the larger group of moderates differ very little on Table B: all tend to accept in whole or in part the major criticisms of the theory. Where the moderates and doubters part from the thoroughgoing skeptics is on the arguments in defense, and to a lesser extent on the

On the other hand, Turner's adherents, and the more staunch defenders of his hypothesis, appear to have their own opinions of critics and criticisms. First of all they plainly reject the charge that the theory is a sectional and Middle Western interpretation.[22] With almost equal enthusiasm they deny that it is naïvely optimistic and full of poetic exaggerations, and object to the criticism that the hypothesis is unsound because not comparative. As can be seen from the votes, a very substantial number of historians do not find Turner's interpretation too patriotic and materialistic, too little concerned with the arts or traditions. Finally, an impressive group emphatically continues to believe that the frontier really did act as a safety-valve.

If evidence had been needed that our profession is badly divided on the subject of weakness in the frontier hypothesis, that evidence would be supplied by Table B.

## Arguments in Defense of the Hypothesis

Postponing other comments, I now propose to complete our exposition of the voting returns by following the champions of the theory to their stronghold in Table C. If we analyze this list of arguments in defense, we find the greatest concentration of votes behind the proposition that the critics are guilty of magnifying minor inconsistencies while ignoring the main observations. Next in rank stands the argument that the theory was a great step forward in its day, and cannot fairly be tested against modern information. Next comes the charge that critics confuse what Turner wrote with what his pupils and others have written or said. This is immediately followed in popularity by the rather contradictory observation that the theory ought to be brought up to date by reading Turner's continuators. Substantial support goes

acceptability of certain propositions in Table A. Numbered among this middle group of voters are Charles M. Andrews, Reed Bain, Charles A. Beard, Howard Becker, Ray A. Billington, E. L. Bogart, H. S. Commager, Ralph H. Gabriel, Herbert Heaton, William B. Hesseltine, Ellsworth Huntington, Frank L. Owsley, W. W. Sweet, and Chester W. Wright.

[22] "As to the attacks on the basis of emotional attitudes, I might say to begin with, that Turner did not seem to be an unduly emotional man. He may have over-emphasized the Middle West, but it has to be admitted that one may praise the Middle West quite appreciably before the praise becomes fulsome."

also to the propositions that the critics take a poetic interpretation too literally, that the theory is useful even outside American history, and that it is still the best stimulus for students of our growth. Incidentally, the totals show beyond much doubt that the average argument in defense of the theory is acceptable or at least partially satisfactory to two voters out of every three.

Letters and comments put emphasis also on the neglect by critics of Turner's other writings, on defining doubtful elements in the hypothesis as exaggerations rather than errors, and on defending Turner's varying use of the words "frontier" and "West."

> . . . the so-called "frontier hypothesis" cannot successfully be isolated for examination apart from the whole complex of Turner's thought. To attempt this is to get it out of perspective, to distort it more or less, by attaching undue significance to apparent oversights or overstresses.—HOMER C. HOCKETT.

> This part of the controversy could be very much expanded.—B. H. HIBBARD.

> I am inclined to think that in most cases the causal relationship was exaggerated rather than inaccurate.—CHESTER W. WRIGHT.

> I would allow for overstatements and understatements. I think I am trying to say that there is down deep a harmony which Turner himself, and his followers, have sensed but have never worked out in a formal statement—HOMER C. HOCKETT.

> To argue the meaning of the West to Turner strikes me as hardly worthwhile. When he said the West, he meant the West and as we all know, sometimes with one connotation, sometimes with another. —B. H. HIBBARD.

> I do not object to the various definitions of the word "frontier," as used by Turner. In their context, to the best of my knowledge, they are all clear.—J. D. HICKS.

It seems a fair deduction from the votes and comments of the master's disciples that to many of them his explanations still explain, and with small loss in power. In essential meaning if not in words, more than a few echo this Wisconsin comment: "Turner's thesis seems to me the most significant and valid interpretation which explains the Americanness of America."

Whether, in the light of the full returns, the same can still be said of our profession as a whole, is the question that I next propose to examine.

## THE CONTENT OF THE HYPOTHESIS

What was the "frontier hypothesis"? Turner himself was not always consistent on this subject; and modern historians frequently disagree. Perhaps Turner's celebrated essay of 1893 on "The Significance of the American Frontier" may be taken as the classic statement. From this and from the twelve other frontier essays (republished together in 1920) the following analysis has been constructed. In the interest of discovering the strong and the weak points of Turner's interpretation, your opinion of each element in the theory is asked.

Please indicate your acceptance, doubt or rejection, by marking a cross in the appropriate column opposite each item.

Please also specify, by a mark in the fourth column, those propositions that (whether you agree with them or not) seem to you indispensable to the frontier hypothesis.

### A. THE FRONTIER HYPOTHESIS BROKEN DOWN INTO ITS CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS

| Would Accept | Would Restudy | Would Discard | Indispensable to Theory | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *What the "Frontier" was:* (In the frontier essays, the reader finds the concept of the "Frontier" variously employed.) |
| 8 | 2 | 0 | 10 | |
| 34 | 9 | 16 | 23 | ———*The Frontier defined or used as geography* |
| | | | | ———as a line; the edge of settlement, of free |
| 47 | 12 | 5 | 30 | land, of the wilderness. |
| | | | | ———as a place or zone: on both sides of this |
| 16 | 17 | 25 | 10 | line. |
| | | | | ———as natural resources: forest, farm land, |
| 6 | 11 | 36 | 5 | minerals. |
| | | | | ———as other natural features: mountains, |
| 20 | 13 | 24 | 18 | rivers, plains, etc. |
| | | | | ———as location: on the westward fringe, or in the Middle West, or West of Alleghenies, or away from the coast, or |
| 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 | any non-Eastern place. |
| 39 | 12 | 14 | 19 | ———*The Frontier defined in terms of population* |
| | | | | ———by density: a sparse population: about |
| 33 | 14 | 11 | 24 | 2 per square mile. |
| | | | | ———by occupational groups: fur trappers, fur traders, herders, pioneer scratch farmers |
| 13 | 4 | 1 | 12 | (intensive farmers?). |
| | | | | ———*The Frontier understood as a special Combination of Geography, Population, and Psychology* |
| 24 | 18 | 10 | 14 | ———as savage wilderness, as hardship and challenge. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 49 | 13 | 5 | 35 | ——————————as free land, as the gate of opportunity, as the source of hope. |
| 8 | 2 | 1 | 9 | ——————————*The Frontier defined as Process* |
| 29 | 24 | 9 | 16 | ——————————as escape: from Europe and the East, from the traditions and rules of organized society, from inequalities or tyranny and hardship: as safety-valve. |
| 40 | 17 | 6 | 20 | ——————————as movement: migration westward in a regular occupational series. |
| 40 | 19 | 7 | 27 | ——————————as change: by starting over, by invention of new ways, by modifying old ways, by mixture with other immigrants, by breaking the cake of custom. |
| 16 | 27 | 15 | 11 | ——————————as repetition of the above procedures, until the habit of change, etc., becomes ingrained. |
| 17 | 19 | 27 | 10 | ——————————more loosely: as the process of changing from Europeans into Americans. |
| | | | | *Results of the "Frontier"* |
| 36 | 23 | 4 | 31 | ——————————*Results for Personal Character:* (Under this head a great many qualities are enumerated, e.g., individualism, democracy, energy, optimism, inventiveness, coarseness, materialism, idealism, etc., etc.) |
| 4 | 1 | 0 | 5 | ——————————*Results for Society* |
| 26 | 26 | 13 | 7 | ——————————Destruction of some institutions, esp. fine arts. |
| 39 | 26 | 4 | 11 | ——————————Simplification of others, e.g., law. |
| 32 | 29 | 7 | 20 | ——————————Improvement of political and economic institutions, especially in direction of greater freedom, equality, and well-being. |
| 16 | 31 | 20 | 13 | ——————————"American democracy was born of no theorist's dream; it was not carried in the *Sarah Constant* to Virginia. . . . It came out of the American forest. . . ." |
| 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 | ——————————*Results for East and for Europe* |
| 26 | 33 | 8 | 16 | ——————————Forced to modify institutions in same direction, to become more liberal. |

If the foregoing synopsis is not satisfactory, how would you correct it to make it a more faithful statement of Turner's theory?

| Agree with Critics | Agree in part | Don't know | Reject Criticism | ATTACKS<br>Your preferences (or comments) are also desired on each of the following. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | B. ATTACKS ON THE FRONTIER HYPOTHESIS |
| | | | | *Attacks on the Basis of methods used in Frontier Essays* |
| 21 | 23 | 2 | 24 | _____Definition of "Frontier," etc., is said to be too vague, shifting, all-inclusive. |
| 25 | 25 | 2 | 16 | _____Explanation claimed to be too simple, made to cover too much; results too great for causes named. |
| 12 | 16 | 9 | 31 | _____Method unsound because not comparative. |
| 13 | 17 | 10 | 12 | _____Thesis was repeated but never restudied in later essays: |
| 17 | 21 | 10 | 10 | _____—little fresh examination of evidence. |
| 22 | 20 | 9 | 7 | _____—insufficient overhauling of theory as time passed. |
| 18 | 20 | 2 | 27 | _____Thesis internally confused and contradictory: Novelty derived from repetition, idealism from materialism, improvement of civilization from its abandonment, increases in Nationalism and Sectionalism from one and the same source, etc., etc. |
| | | | | *Attacks on basis of Emotional Attitudes implicit in Hypothesis* |
| 14 | 22 | 2 | 31 | _____It is said to be a sectional theory: the glorification of the Middle West. |
| 18 | 20 | 3 | 26 | _____Attacked for provincial patriotism: emphasis on "Americanisms"; failure to compare with frontiers elsewhere in world. |
| 19 | 19 | 0 | 27 | _____Attacked for Materialism: especially deterministic interpretation of geography and migration; neglect of traditions, of variations in the East, of influence of European ideas. |
| 13 | 25 | 2 | 24 | _____Attacked for Cultural Bias: emphasis on government and economics, lack of interest in education, science, letters, arts, and refinements. |
| 10 | 21 | 5 | 29 | _____Unsatisfactory because of naif optimism: other poetic exaggerations. |

*Attacks from angle of other Theories and Disciplines*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | 5 | 38 | 13 | Theory unsatisfactory to geographers. |
| 8 | 9 | 24 | 16 | Theory unsatisfactory to economists, esp. to economic determinists. |
| 2 | 11 | 27 | 15 | Theory unsatisfactory to anthropologists, sociologists, social psychologists, etc. |
| 11 | 18 | 11 | 17 | Theory unsatisfactory to students of culture and the history of ideas. |

*Attacks on Particular Conclusions found in the thesis*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16 | 19 | 1 | 17 | Was there really much originality on the frontier or in the Middle West? A number of students now hold that the Frontier populations were essentially conservative, and imitative rather than original. |
| 5 | 17 | 9 | 29 | Did the Frontier really act as a "Safety-valve"? This view is denied. |
| 22 | 9 | 7 | 6 | It is asserted that the West did not breed abler, more distinguished, more original men. |

How have recent criticisms modified your own views of the frontier?

| Agree with Defense | Agree in part | Don't know | Defense Unsound | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | DEFENSE |
| | | | | Please indicate your reaction to |
| | | | | C. ARGUMENTS IN DEFENSE OF THE HYPOTHESIS |
| | | | | *Its critics are misguided:* |
| 20 | 24 | 4 | 16 | Critics take frontier essays too literally. These represent poetic perceptions, not factual statements. |
| 24 | 24 | 11 | 7 | Critics confuse what Turner wrote with what his pupils and others have written or said. |
| 18 | 17 | 18 | 9 | Critics unfairly judge the essays without reference to his other writings and teaching. |
| 33 | 20 | 2 | 13 | Critics magnify minor inconsistencies and ignore main observations. |

| Agree with Defense | Agree in part | Don't know | Defense Unsound | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Theory a great advance:* |
| 30 | 20 | 0 | 14 | _____For its day: not fair to test it against modern information. |
| 21 | 20 | 3 | 13 | _____For the area of the Middle West in the 19th century, if less applicable elsewhere, or in other periods. |
| 18 | 7 | 4 | 5 | _____Theory illuminating for local history of _____ (name area) |
| 25 | 12 | 6 | 12 | _____Theory still best stimulus for students of our growth. |
| 23 | 17 | 4 | 11 | _____The Theory should be brought up to date by reading some of Turner's continuators, especially Paxson, Schafer, Craven, etc. |
| | | | | *The Theory still valid:* |
| 26 | 14 | 3 | 20 | _____Has not been disproved in any essential point, at least for American history. |
| 23 | 24 | 8 | 10 | _____Theory useful even beyond the U.S., especially for the colonial experience of other peoples. |
| 16 | 14 | 2 | 27 | _____Validity of the theory established by its general acceptance, by the number of writers it has influenced, by the number of books it has inspired, by the failure of its critics to establish their points of view. |

In your opinion, is it still satisfactory to most American historians?

What should be done to test or restate the hypothesis?

Beyond the writers listed in Everett E. Edwards, what historians would you advise me to consult? (If you wish extra copies of this questionnaire sent to colleagues, or for your own use, please let me know.)

FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER

From a photograph taken at the Huntington Library, May, 1927

# American Historians and the Frontier Hypothesis in 1941 (II)*

*By* George Wilson Pierson

With the votes and more trenchant opinions of our colleagues before us, we begin for the first time to command the information indispensable to the formation of a considered judgment. Originally we asked what might be the state of mind of American historians on the celebrated frontier hypothesis. Without any claim to finality, a rough outline of an answer may perhaps be begun in the following terms.

(1) American historians have up to now been as much (if not more) interested in Frederick Jackson Turner as in his frontier theory. (2) On both subjects feelings are sometimes remarkably strong and divergent. Yet the state of opinion in our profession cannot accurately be described as chaotic. Rather—in the returns from the questionnaire, as increasingly in the controversial literature of the subject—(3) certain agreements, and (4) certain clearly defined areas of conflict, begin to emerge.

## General Agreements

The letters and comments, in particular, make it plain that critics and champions alike are pretty generally agreed in at least four opinions of far-reaching significance.

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* Dr. Pierson is associate professor of history at Yale University and a leader in the movement to reassess the frontier theory. This paper is based on an informal report, entitled "The Frontier Hypothesis in the Light of Modern Criticism," which was delivered before a joint session of the Mississippi Valley and American Historical Associations, at their annual meeting in Chicago, December 30, 1941. In reorganizing and expanding these remarks for publication, the author had the advantage of a number of thoughtful criticisms and the privilege of permission to quote from the opinions of American historians all over the country.

Part I, published in the September Magazine, contains the tables to which Dr. Pierson refers in this, the final, installment.

The first is that Turner was far more tentative as a teacher than as an essayist. At least in class, according to Homer C. Hockett, Turner's approach "was extraordinarily broad, for he perceived the necessity of analyzing *every* process which contributed to the making of America." As he himself suggested, he had no single "key"; even the double-barreled shotgun of *Frontier* and *Section* threw too small a pattern for this hunter. Rather he relied, and advised others to rely, on "multiple hypotheses," on causes unappreciated and unrecognized. With a characteristic modesty, he listened readily to new interpretations. As more than one friend has ruefully reported, and as our returns amply confirm, it was next to impossible to get him to write, or even to explore thoroughly, what he himself had turned up;[23] he so much preferred the wandering life, the pioneering after new lands.

I think that students who studied with Dr. Turner would agree that the outstanding characteristic of his seminar teaching was continuous questioning—as to facts, as to ideas—certainly as to "interpretations." Certainly this was his view of his "conclusions" when he presented them in his essays. At no time—(and my contact with him covers the years 1906 to the month of his death)—did he even suggest—let alone assert—that he had presented a theory or an explanation *fully* or *finally*. It was always tentative; it was always going forward because he was always questioning. It was this characteristic—his whole attitude of mind—that made him the master he was.[24]—EDGAR E. ROBINSON.

The second agreement among American historians has been deduced via a sort of argument from silence. No single reply mentioned any document wherein Turner's true view of the frontier may be found more accurately formulated than in his Frontier Essays. Instead, as one would anticipate, whenever the essays are discounted or amended, the critic is referred for correction to what Turner taught in his classes, or to what his pupils can remember of what he taught, or to what these same pupils taught a second

[23] For confirmation, see the illuminating studies by Max Farrand: "Frederick Jackson Turner at the Huntington Library," Huntington Library, *Bulletin*, February, 1933; and "Frederick Jackson Turner, a Memoir," Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings*, 65:432–40 (1932–36).

[24] "Turner did everything possible for his students, while leaving them entirely free to pursue their own line of thought. He taught the principles of independent historical research, which when at the Sorbonne under Langlois and Seignobos, I found no need to modify."—LOUISE PHELPS KELLOGG.

generation of pupils, miles away and years after.[25] Does this body of teachings comprise a consistent and ascertainable doctrine on the frontier? Unfortunately it does not appear to.[26] At least the returns show each pupil reconstructing the theory for himself; and, as we shall be reminded, these individual versions are not wanting in variety. Without much question, we should be better off if some résumé or syllabus could be formulated by agreement among Turner's students. Then the rather positive Frontier Essays could perhaps be "controlled" by Turner's distinctly more tentative teachings.

The third conviction on which defenders and critics pretty generally unite is the belief that the hypothesis ought to be judged on its own merits and on the basis of frontier evidence. This vote ought to have been—and I am glad to say was—very one-sided. The fact that the hypothesis has been widely accepted, has exercised great influence, and has not yet been upset, seems to most of us (as undoubtedly it would have seemed to Turner) quite insufficient proof of its validity.

The fourth agreement, which concerns the "social sciences," may, I am afraid, seem less laudable. For it is a confession of ignorance. If the reader will refer back to the "don't know" column of Table B in our questionnaire, he will readily discover the cluster of votes to which reference is made. It is one that might not unreasonably lead the scholarly world to accuse us of professional insularity. For, as historians we do not know, and apparently we do not greatly care, what scholars in the other, non-historical, social studies may have been discovering or writing about our frontier problem. If geographers have criticised Turner's geography, if economists would qualify his economic interpretations, if cultural anthropologists and sociologists are now deriving different quotients from the ratio of man to land, and individual to group, such views seem to your reporter worthy of notice and scrutiny. When an anthropologist asserts: "It is numbers of men, and these in close

[25] Three historians referred me to Turner's other writings. The rest appeared to support Hockett's view that "much came out in Turner's lectures which never got into print over his own signature."

[26] "One thing is clear at the start. Turner himself was *not* clear. He was frank to say it often, and with humor. He always was gentle and humorous. . . ."

contact, which produce advance of civilization," is not that disturbing? When a noted geographer, after studying the "*the pioneer fringe*" of twentieth century frontiers, insists also on "continuity of effort in place," and decides that "it must be more than the land that calls," have such judgments no relevance to the frontier hypothesis? [27]

One Wisconsin sociologist answered the query as to what should be done "to test or restate" the frontier theory by the pithy proposal: "Consult sociologists and anthropologists." Allowing for a certain professional enthusiasm on his part, and ourselves keeping a firm grasp on the notion that historians hold no monopoly on error, might we not entertain such counsel? Whether *pro* or *con* (or indeed interested in other theories altogether), can we safely remain indifferent when such potentially destructive workers are around? At the moment, so far as frontier study goes, the letters, comments—most of all the votes—would seem to say we think we can.

Meanwhile, on other important views and problems, our own guild of scholars seems far from united. In large part, no doubt, because of our very lack of an authoritative frontier canon, disputes outnumber agreements, and American historians seem to be scattered through a whole series of ideological positions. We have already noticed a substantial group deprecating inquiry into the famous hypothesis, or even denying the existence of theory altogether. If we now review the opinions of that majority which is willing to concede the existence of a theory, we find these historians hardly less divided or contentious over its character.

## Disagreements—and Criticisms of the Theory

For example, it can hardly escape observation that there is strong disagreement among our colleagues on at least three questions. Note first the direct clash over the rôle of Turner's pupils and

[27] James G. Leyburn, *Frontier Folkways* (New Haven, 1935), 238; Isaiah Bowman, *The Pioneer Fringe* (New York, 1931), 5, 19. This is no place to quote such authors at length or to discuss diffusionist and culture center theories, the tenets of social psychology, or the recent work of sociologists on migration and group discipline. I do not even suggest that their conclusions are all adverse, or necessarily correct. The point is that they are handling the very stuff out of which Turner constructed his interpretation.

continuators. On the one hand they are accused of being the instrument whereby the critics of Turner's theory have beclouded a lucid theory; on the other they are to be the instrument whereby that theory may be saved and brought up to date.

Again, there is direct disagreement as to whether the hypothesis is, or is not, a sectional—that is, a Middle Western—theory.

In the third place, the fact that to many historians the critics have been too literal-minded and picayune does not preclude an equally large number voting the theory too simple, too vague, too full of contradictions and confusions.

How to reconcile such differences in interpretation and attitude I do not know. The last argument in particular resembles so closely the ancient and familiar rivalry between the woods and the trees, that one would be tempted to ascribe it to the eternal differences in human nature, were it not that the forest (or theory) in question must be held to be verifiable: in part from print, in part from the vivid memories of pupils, in part from the testimony of a host of colleagues and other witnesses. In a word, the present doubts as to the real content of Turner's interpretation seem greater than the availability of evidence makes at all necessary.

Thus far we have been dealing with major interpretations, over which battle has long been waging. And the questionnaire has added nothing to knowledge, unless by establishing the fact that these particular disputes enlist a large proportion of American historians. I wish to report now that other disagreements are now foreseeable or are already upon us. For, scattered through the letters and marginal comments in our returns are to be found an almost staggering number of individual reservations and specific objections. No single criticism is offered as sufficient in itself to destroy the theory: as a matter of fact, a surprising number are put forward by non-partisan historians who vote the hypothesis in most other respects still satisfactory.[28] Notwithstanding the limited

[28] In addition to the men directly named and quoted, the following scholars are represented in this section: Daniel Aaron, Charles A. Beard, Wilfred Black, Gerald M. Capers, Jr., Clarence H. Danhof, Everitt N. Dick, Gilbert J. Garraghan, S.J., Eric F. Goldman, Evarts B. Greene, Herbert Heaton, Ellsworth Huntington, A. L. Kohlmeier, John D. Krout, Stanley M. Pargellis, T. C. Pease, William F. Raney, C. C. Rister, Ralph L. Rusk, Roger Shugg, Benjamin F. Wright, and Chester W. Wright.

intentions behind each criticism, several seem to be of so serious a nature, and viewed all together they constitute so impressive a testimony to dissatisfaction, that no report on our inquiry could pretend to completeness that did not take them into account.

One of the deans of our profession, for example, points out that Turner's theory is overwhelmingly a masculine one, with the rôle of women in Western settlement almost entirely neglected. Whether or not the hypothesis will have to be modified, when that feminine rôle is studied, is a question that American historians may some day have to face.

At least three historians challenge the assumption that the frontier ended in 1890, and one of them calls attention to the strikingly un-Turnerian features of the dry-farming and irrigation frontiers. Two scholars depart from orthodoxy by agreeing that "the greatest single attraction in the West was not crops, climate, social betterment or anything else often mentioned. It was the anticipated rise in real estate values." A third questions the tradition of frontier hardship. Turner's failure to study enough regions, or the empty enclaves or "frontier within," is pointed out by Frank L. Owsley. Turner's exaggeration of the rôle of nature and underemphasis on the malleability of the physical environment—his corresponding neglect of European origins, cultural continuities, later importations, and personal peculiarities—all these are mentioned again and again. A number of the remarks merely buttress certain critical votes in Table B. Yet even a casual reader could not but be impressed by the evidence they present of what would appear to be a pronounced and accelerating drift in our own professional thinking. If the returns on the questionnaire are a reliable criterion, then in November of 1941 we were still moving away from our old preoccupations with nature and the conquest of the continent, and discovering instead a new importance in Europe, in our own East, in the history of ideas and the transfer of culture.

Individual criticism of economic aspects of the frontier theory appear especially numerous. Five students point out that the frontier was economically far more dependent on the East and on

Europe than the older regions were on the frontier. "I regard the westward-moving frontier . . . as part of the process of mercantile and imperial capitalistic expansion, the outward thrust of European and Eastern forces, controlled economically if not politically from the East." Test it, writes Herbert Heaton, "test it by remembering the frontier fringe is part of the economic and political shawl." Attention is invited by a third critic to the neglected effects of technological changes. A fourth suggests that "The failure of Turner and his followers to distinguish adequately between the urban and rural West ought to be mentioned." Incidentally, specific personal reservations on the safety-valve concept are rather frequent. A geographer and a Southern historian underline the importance of migration as distinguished from location. Three men invite us to check the whole theory by the minute study of small areas, by writing "the history of our villages and small towns." Again, a number of historians support a recently developed and rather fundamental criticism by stressing frontier conservatism in economics, religion, and the arts.

My own research convinces me that the "rebirth perennial" on successive frontiers was chiefly important as a process of selection, enabling pioneer groups to decide what they had most dearly cherished among their possessions, material and spiritual, in the regions from which they came. The striking thing about their decisions is the relative conservatism of the results.—JOHN D. KROUT.

As far as I know it, the frontier was slavish in copying older patterns.

It would be neither accurate nor fair to give the reader the impression that all the particular comments accompanying the returns are hostile to the theory. On the contrary, Roscoe Pound considers the hypothesis "well taken for American legal institutions." J. T. Adams refutes one criticism by insisting that "you cannot build an empire out of an abandoned farm in New England." B. H. Hibbard meets another by seeming to agree with Turner that "Western men and views were at least fresh and new." T. C. Pease and S. F. Bemis endorse Turner's interpretation of frontier influence on personal character. Others consider his

environmental philosophy still most illuminating. Billington and Reed Bain bolster the frontier theory against charges of cultural degradation by suggesting amendment of the theory to take account of the creative artistry of the frontiersmen. And Lewis Mumford remarks that "the backwash of frontier life upon settled practices and theories has not been sufficiently studied." Meanwhile, at least three scholars deplore what they consider the growing neglect of Turner's ideas and methods. "The frontier as a *continuing* process should be given more consideration. . . . It can so easily be applied to present and even future developments, because new frontiers are always in the making." As W. P. Webb puts it, "The hypothesis is generally sound, but its implications—for today and for the future—have never been grasped." [29]

Obviously, the defense of the frontier theory in detail is by no means neglected. Yet, after reviewing the returns, one is constrained to remark again that on the whole the defenders put their real effort into the support of Turner, of Turner the teacher, of Turner the prophet of a very general "approach." Meanwhile, the specific criticism of Turner's individual discoveries, or interpretations, or "suggestions," proceeds apace. Witness the attacks on the two all-important Turnerian assumptions of frontier individualism, and frontier equality or democracy.

Most glaring of the Turner errors is probably his stress on the lone frontiersman and the effect of the frontier on rugged American individualism. Certainly the few careful studies of frontier communities . . . show that the *group* was more important in the west than in the east. American individualism developed from opportunity, not from isolated living.—RAY A. BILLINGTON.

The more I studied the matter, the more I was convinced that frontier life did not encourage intellectual individualism. It was sure to develop new group prejudices, but any environment will inevitably exhibit that brand of independence. That is not individualism.—RALPH L. RUSK.

. . . I have seen too many communities come into being as *adult* societies transferred bodily from the seaboard states. . . .—FRANK L. OWSLEY.

[29] Specific comments in defense were received from a number of supporters listed and quoted in the first section of this report, as well as from Lucy Lockwood Adams, Wilfred Black, E. E. Dale, Arthur B. Darling, Everitt N. Dick, John L. Harr, B. H. Hibbard, A. L. Kohlmeier, and W. A. Mackintosh.

Equality should never be stressed in teaching about the frontier. There were great, surprisingly great, economic inequalities from the beginning.—WILLIAM F. RANEY.

Even the casual reading I have done convinces me that the frontier community was far from a complete plateau—that democracy was not automatically bred by wilderness conditions. Each frontier had its aristocracy and its lower classes. . . .—RAY A. BILLINGTON.

If Turner meant to say that life on a frontier made for economic levelling and that this is an element of democracy, then I would insist that it would be quite possible convincingly to tell the story of the successive wests, with their rich natural resources, in terms of their power to create an economic aristocracy. Or, in short, the west destroyed democracy in this sense as fast as it made it.

The critique of our democratic ideology proceeds also along chronological and psychological lines. On the one hand, Stanley M. Pargellis points out that "There was a frontier in this country for 150 years in the colonial period which did not produce political democracy." And another writer observes that "at least certain areas of the west adopted political democracy . . . after they had passed the time when they were mostly frontier." Whereas "most of our so-called 'democracy,' in the modern sense, has been achieved since the 1890s."

On the other hand, the same American historian and A. R. M. Lower of Canada distinguish between economic discontent and liberalism, and between both of these and frontier.

. . . wherever people have been economically discontented, whether on the frontier or in the slums, they have advanced a "democratic" program.

Is there any necessary connection between frontier democracy and liberalism? I doubt if there is. It is sophistication, not the primitive which breeds tolerance and largeness of mind.

It hardly needs pointing out that many of these specific criticisms are not absolute or lethal. They are not always consistent with each other, and they have still to be demonstrated on the evidence. Certainly they do not now seem to enlist the support or opposition of whole armies of historians. Yet if even a small percentage of the doubts thus hinted at in our returns may be regarded as harbingers of articles and books to come, then indeed does the morrow

threaten to be stormy. Unless, of course, we shall meanwhile be swept off our feet by some new revelation, and lose interest and forget. But in that case we shall indeed be doing what more than one historian counsels: we shall be abandoning a theory before its merits and defects have ever systematically been threshed out.

## Conclusions and Obiter Dicta

It will not do to conclude dogmatically on the basis of an imperfect questionnaire answered by only 106 scholars. Yet even such limited returns warrant a few additional observations.

I have already deduced from the materials on hand that American historical opinion on the frontier hypothesis, badly divided and partisan as it may appear, is not wholly chaotic. Perhaps the field of struggle can be brought into sharper focus by noticing again that the armies of the *pros* and *cons* have as yet only partially engaged. The former being preoccupied with personal and ideological defense, the latter dividing their attention between ideology and factual details, battle thus far has naturally declared itself mainly in the center. This is the broad plain where attitudes and philosophies are at stake, where exaggeration and bias are charged and defended. Off on one wing the champions of Turner the man, Turner the teacher, Turner the explorer, hold their high citadel almost unchallenged. On the other wing, in the dense forests of facts, through the broken country of our past, small parties are painfully working, only occasionally to encounter and fall upon one another. Here indeed the trees are so thick, the small objectives so detached, as almost to conceal the over-all significance of what is going on. It is still a region unoccupied, a historical no-man's-land.

Another way of putting this is to say that the members of our profession have reached agreement on certain vital points—on the basis of knowledge and belief have decided to disagree on certain others—and are now discovering a mutual ignorance about the remainder. This last is my fifth conclusion. I propose that we examine it.

If my reading of the questionnaire is not at fault, we seem to be discovering that we know less than we had supposed about historical causation. I am not here referring so much to our disregard of geographers and sociologists as underlining the votes in the second columns of Tables A and B. These votes indicate that we now accept only in part, or would be willing to restudy, a number of aspects of the frontier hypothesis. Specifically, we show ourselves uncertain as to the causes or the effects of migration; the relation of the frontier to institutional inventions and changes seems increasingly obscure; we are almost audibly resolving to study once again that most vital and anxious of American riddles: the riddle of the origins of our democracy. One suspects that problems so fundamental will never be completely settled. Yet an effort to diminish our ignorance and helplessness in these fields can hardly fail to result in new points of view. From our doubts, and from our awareness of the mysteriousness of social processes, I believe that before long may come a thorough revision in our attitudes toward the frontier. This is not to predict the deflation of Turner's great American first cause. On the contrary, it may be that the frontier will emerge from such trials even more powerful than Turner imagined it. All that seems certain is that its significance will by no means remain the same.

Meanwhile, my sixth conclusion is that—at least among those answering the inquiry, and probably among American historians generally—the champions and believers still clearly outnumber the critics. As of November, 1941, not only does almost everyone find some good in the theory, but a pronounced majority seem a long way from abandoning certain central propositions. The totals on Table A indicate how decisive that margin must be. Perhaps the proportion of defenders to attackers is not as great as 2 to 1. But when the letters are added to the questionnaires, and all the replies are then divided into three categories (those in favor of the Turner interpretation, those who are doubtful or who would restudy, and those who now find the theory unsatisfactory), the results are as follows: *pro* 42; *would revise or restudy* 41; *con*

23. In percentages, this gives 39.6; 38.7; 21.7. Your reporter finds these statistics impressive.

If a member of the obvious minority may offer a warning, however, it is that the hold of the grand Turnerian hypothesis on our profession may even at this writing be less firm than the over-all totals would indicate. This is my seventh conclusion. To go no farther than the returns on the questionnaire, it ought not to be overlooked that hardly a proposition in the theory but numbers today a substantial group of opponents or doubters. Again, I infer from Tables B and C (and letters and published articles support the deduction) that the defenders are not thoroughly agreed except on two points, namely: admiration for Turner, and a conviction that the natural environment has played an important rôle in American development.

The precariousness of Turner's authority would be underlined if confirmation were obtained for the unreliable indications we now have that the hypothesis is actually less satisfactory to American historians than it is supposed or believed to be. A question along this last line was submitted to our voters. Unfortunately, this question was badly worded and it was answered by only 58 voters. So far as the figures go, however, they are curious. If we disregard 8 votes of ignorance, we find at least 31 and not more than 35 (62–70 percent) supposing the theory satisfactory to most American historians, at most 9 and not less than 5 (10–18 percent) holding it partly satisfactory, and 10 (20 percent) feeling it to be unsatisfactory. The reader will recall that the 106 returns to the questionnaire themselves classified as follows: not quite 40 percent *pro,* not quite 39 percent *divided,* and not quite 22 percent *con.* Comparing, we find that the two estimates agree in labeling one-fifth of the profession as pretty thoroughly dissatisfied.[30] The replies to the questionnaire, however, indicate that the remaining 80 percent are *actually* divided about evenly between the doubtful

[30] On the basis of their letters and votes, the following among others would seem to qualify in this group: Ralph V. Harlow, Jay B. Hubbell, William T. Hutchinson, Edward C. Kirkland, Stanley M. Pargellis, Robert E. Riegel, Carl C. Rister, Ralph L. Rusk, Richard H. Shryock, Roger Shugg, Fred A. Shannon, and Benjamin F. Wright.

and the satisfied; whereas the guess of those willing to venture one is that this remainder of 80 percent is overwhelmingly in favor of the original theory, with few if any doubters or investigators. Let us not rely too heavily on this particular evidence. Perhaps all that these figures indicate is a beguiling tendency on the part of each historian to suppose that it is always his colleague—rather than he himself—who swallows any theory 100 percent.

Difficult and treacherous as such measurements are, a sort of correlation may also lie concealed in the replies from scholars and specialists in allied fields. It was pointed out at the start that certain economists and economic historians, literary and religious historians, Canadian historians, anthropologists and sociologists were included in this inquiry. Only some thirty-odd finally participated, so once again the sampling is too scanty to be reliable. Yet it is perhaps not wholly accidental that—in their replies as in their published work—historians of the churches and of the Canadian frontier seem to give the theory the greatest support; that literary historians are once again discovering reservations after a brief but enthusiastic honeymoon with the theory in the 1920's; and that professors of economics and sociology on the whole seem even more doubtful than are American historians. Is it that the frontier meant more in certain fields than in others? Or ought one to account for this divergence of view on the theory that the latecomers in the field may still be in the early stages of uncritical acceptance and application, while the rest are now encountering more and more doubts and are gradually beginning to move away?

Whatever the correct explanation of these last statistical oddities, I return to the suggestion that the replies to the questionnaire, superficially so favorable to the hypothesis, may actually indicate a stormier future and a larger present skepticism in our profession than we ourselves have realized. Judging by the bald voting totals, the tide still seems full. Looking beneath the surface, it would appear that the current has turned and is quietly beginning to run out.

## The Frontier Theory and American Legend

I wish to report now one final group of comments too interesting to ignore. For they hint at a new use and a new understanding of the frontier hypothesis.

Many of us have been puzzled to account for the popularity of Turner's theory: a vogue that went beyond what either the historian or his explanation might ordinarily have been able to achieve. How did it happen, then? The answer does not always come directly. But one writer calls Turner the American Darwin; a second cites Spencer; a third likens Turner to Darwin again. Perhaps the master translated evolution for American historians? Perhaps. But the next note describes Turner's history as 100 percent American history; and suddenly there comes to mind the letter from a colleague, months ago, pointing out that Turner was a sort of American Treitschke, a patriot. [31]

Murray Kane, starting with Turner's economics, has become curious about the German anthropogeographer, Ratzel, and a possible indebtedness. Others have been reminded of the Physiocrats, and of the agrarian philosophers. The cult of the gentle savage and European Romanticism seem not so far away. I believe it was Beard who intimated that, after all, Wisconsin forest democracy may not have been so very different from the German forest liberty of The Johns Hopkins. Carl Sauer, geographer, has suggested somewhere that Turner's occupational series (hunter, herder, pioneer) is a Roman classification. And just the other day a discerning scholar in the field of eighteenth century literature in part answered the questionnaire by a startling device. He compared Turner's list of Americanisms (that set of peculiar traits, deriving from the frontier, which makes us different from Euro-

[31] " Turner was in some ways similar to Von Treitschke, not only in the fact that both were ardent nationalists, but in that both first elaborated a provincial tradition—the West in one case, the Prussian in the other—and then established this tradition as the national epic for an entire people. This in turn left Easterners in the one case, and Bavarians in the other, with misgivings in the premises."—Richard H. Shryock.

Elsewhere I have suggested that Turner's patriotic enthusiasm may have disguised the somewhat " sectional " character of his essays, and made them nationally acceptable. It will not escape the reader that these essays span the period of 1893 to 1920: the period of the Spanish-American War, navalism, imperialism, and Theodore Roosevelt.

peans) with a stock eighteenth century English picture of the small farmer of Britain. It was not uninteresting to discover the great American master seated so close to Adam Smith and to Wordsworth.

By now the force of these parallels will begin to emerge. Perhaps the frontier hypothesis gave expression in some mysterious fashion to the ancient and powerful beliefs. Perhaps it also voiced certain dynamic new ideas. When you then find Turner himself labeled, and referred to again, as the Walt Whitman of American historiography, the popularity and significance of his Frontier Essays suddenly become clearer. Were not these utterances in the main current of American ideology? Did not these poetic interpretations, these seemingly professional essays, revive the grandest ideas that had gone to make up the American legend—and fuse them with the newer "scientific" philosophies?

The reader will surely have encountered e'er this the notion that Turner's ideas were not without ancestry and indebtedness. Is it then in any way revolutionary to insist that the master didn't invent every element in his synthesis? Your reporter would be the last to make such a claim. The significance of the above parallels lies rather in their general bearing on our national character and folklore. The point is: they may tell us as much about American assumptions and prejudices as about the fast disappearing frontier.

Inevitably, too, Turner's hypothesis tells us about Frederick Jackson Turner and about the historians of his generation. As a shrewd student of our psychology puts it,

> The interesting thing, then, is not Turner, but the way in which his thesis was taken up by others. It would seem to have met some unsatisfied longing in American minds, to have afforded a kind of semi-scientific proof couched in the idiom of the day for the uniqueness of American culture. We desperately wanted to believe that around the turn of the century.

If this be so, if Turner wove together for historians their beliefs—part popular, part scientific, part new and foreign, part old

American or anciently out of Europe—let it also be agreed that he did it well.

On the other hand, the conclusion would still remain that the popularity of the frontier hypothesis may be as good evidence of our assumptions from 1890 to 1920 as of our history before 1890. Might we not well begin to study the theory less as truth than as social phenomenon?

Even on this basis, the critics and the minority are hardly so radical. For what they seem to propose is not abandonment but restudy: restudy of the *frontier itself* to find out more nearly what it was, restudy of the *frontier hypothesis* to find out what we ourselves have been, and in a measure still are. Allow me to repeat, these and the host of as yet undeveloped criticisms are minority suggestions only. Clearly our profession is not quite ready to embrace them. Whether we will later remains to be seen.

# The Turner Thesis: A Historian's Controversy

*By* J. A. BURKHART

IN 1893 MEMBERS of the American Historical Association heard Frederick Jackson Turner read a paper entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." The paper had perhaps more profound influence than any other essay or volume ever written in American historiography. Yet more amazing than the influence of this paper was Turner's ability, living in the period about which he was writing, to discern the effect of his era on American history. As part of the drift, Turner was able to chart the course of the passing currents of American life.

According to the Turner thesis, the American frontier has presented a series of recurring social revolutions in different and changing geographical areas as the tide of empire moved forward to win a continent from a raw and hostile wilderness.[1] With constant re-exposure to relentless surroundings, reestablishing and readjusting an old way of life, and creating a process of "starting again from scratch" and working to a more advanced society, there resulted that indefinable something which has been called Americanization. Its fundamental sign was expansion; its chief condition was constant readjustment; its final result was Americanization.[2]

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[1] Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1921), 2.

[2] A number of excellent analyses and evaluations of the Turner thesis have been made. Among the most significant are the following: Avery O. Craven, "Frederick Jackson Turner," in *The Marcus W. Jernegan Essays in American Historiography* (Chicago, 1937), 252–70; Joseph Schafer, "Turner's Frontier Philosophy," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 16:451–69 (June, 1933); and Frederic L. Paxson, "A Generation of the Frontier Hypothesis," *Pacific Valley Historical Review*, 2:34–51 (March, 1933).

Because the place where the most rapid change from the complex to the primitive occurred was on the outer fringe of the westward advance, Turner called this area "the frontier." Of great importance was that it lay "at the hither edge of free land." Turner observed its influence on the frontiersman:

> The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel and thought.... Little by little he transforms the wilderness. But the outcome is not the old Europe.... The fact is that here is a new product that is American.... Thus the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines. And to study this advance, the men who grew up in these conditions, and the political, economic and social effects of it, is to study the really American part of our history.[3]

However, the word frontier is a study in sematics itself. Turner used it to denote many stages of the process. His writings describe various stages and gradations of its development. Turner has written of an Indian, hunter, trapper, and explorer stage; a squatter phase; an Indian removal step; and finally the advance of the Anglo-American settlement, the small farmer and settler, followed by capital and large scale enterprise.[4]

The result of this frontier process was a social devolution and evolution caused by the reversion of an advanced society to a simple and primitive culture and back again to a complex way of life. The slow climb back to complexity was not unlike that which mankind had experienced in the long march of civilization. The frontier process, however, was in a condensed state and proceeded at a much more rapid rate.

Just as significant as the social evolution were the effects which this experience had on men, society, and institutions. The social and the cultural luggage carried by the settler in his journey westward were not thrown overboard, but new institutions and attitudes flavored by the frontier were invariably produced. Thus every frontier created many changes in the character of men and institutions.

Turner, after discussing the frontier process, stated that the frontier promoted the formation of a composite nationality. As

[3] *The Frontier in American History*, 4–5.
[4] *Ibid.*, 11–22.

the population moved westward, dependence upon Europe was ended and independence was begun. The European was Americanized. Pride in one's country and confidence in its future were encouraged. Frontier problems became national problems when men on the frontier called upon the government to do things for them. Local questions often became matters of national concern because of political exigencies or population mobility. "The economic and social characteristics of the frontier worked against sectionalism" and "the mobility of population [was] death to localism."[5]

Perhaps the most dramatic and pertinent element in the frontier was its democratizing influence. Turner assumed that democracy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meant an increase in individualism, an expansion of voting rights, and a greater participation of the common man in the affairs of the state. Many times the word was used very loosely. At times Turner discussed democracy in reference to a frontier society in which the individual had relative social and economic equality; at other times he used the word to describe the broadening of the franchise and the increased participation of the individual in self-government or representative government.[6]

Working hand in glove with the democratizing influence, was the frontier stimulation of equality. The simplicity of society and the economic opportunity promoted by the presence of unoccupied land and unexploited natural resources generated an equality centered around competitive individualism. Equality, individualism, and democracy were all essential ingredients in the melting pot of the frontier. Sometimes this equality meant little more than the equal right to become unequal, together with the right to protest, complain, exploit, and grumble. In any event, the leveling influence, the eroding effect, and the worshipping of achievement all contributed to making the "Horatio Alger hero" a national model. Turner with his characteristic insight noted these conditions:

> It was not only a society in which the love of equality was prominent: it was also a competitive society. To its socialist critics it seemed not

[5] *Ibid.*, 30. [6] *Ibid.*, 30–31.

so much a democracy as a society whose members were "expectant capitalists." ... It was based upon the idea of the fair chance for all men, not on the conception of leveling by arbitrary methods and especially by law.[7]

Finally, according to Turner, the frontier tended to change the character, qualities, and attitudes of the men and of the societies which they created. Western society had distinctive flavors. It had a psychosis conditioned and patterned by the forces which gave it birth:

The West, at the bottom, is a form of society, rather than an area. It is the term applied to the region whose social conditions result from the application of older institutions and ideas to the transforming influences of free land. By this application a new environment is suddenly entered, freedom of opportunity is opened, the cake of custom is broken, and new activities, new lines of growth, new institutions and ideals, are brought into existence.[8]

In like manner the West tended to develop specific qualities and characteristics in the men themselves. Some of the more prominent traits were:

That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy, that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom—thesé are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier.[9]

The Turner thesis, expanded, interpreted, and circulated by his many followers, was accepted almost without reservation or criticism for more than a generation. Part of this was due, of course, to the merit of Turner's writing, and part of it was due to the tremendous personality of Turner himself. Even today any critical discussion of Turner in many quarters finds the air filled with pride and prejudice. However, in 1926 John Almack launched an indictment of many of the ideas which had been given respectability through their association with the frontier thesis.[10] While Almack's article was overcrowded with details, it did clear the air and open the door for re-evaluation of much

[7] Turner, *The United States, 1830–1850* (New York, 1935), 20.
[8] *Frontier in American History*, 205.
[9] *Ibid.*, 37.
[10] John C. Almack, "The Shibboleth of the Frontier," *Historical Outlook*, 16:197–202 (May, 1925).

that had previously been written. A great deal of the evidence advanced in this article discounting the influence and importance of the frontier seems on second sight to be simply window dressing. For example, in the statistical comparison between the accomplishments of frontier and non-frontier areas in regard to general culture, education, land values, physical well being, national leaders, and so on, one wonders if Almack was not discussing foregone conclusions.[11]

Yet the article contained much honest and sound argument. Almack renders a real service in pointing out that the frontier was not the spearhead behind many governmental reforms. Such important innovations as equal suffrage, free tax supported schools, direct legislation, civil service reform, primary nominations, and the recall owed their acceptance more to labor forces than to the frontier process.[12] Continuing this line of attack, Almack observed that imitation and not invention was the rule when many of the frontier states drew up their constitutions.[13] To be fair, however, he should have pointed out that the frontiersman did not have time to devote to such seemingly unimportant matters as government. Making a living was a full-time job on the frontier, and any technique which would save time found wide acceptance.

Almack's attempt to compare present-day frontier areas with urban sections hardly raises itself to the dignity of an argument. Taking Paxson's definition that the frontier area consists of between two and six persons per square mile, Almack observes that today we have many sections which would qualify as the frontier under such a definition. Further, such sections are among the most retarded in the nation. Speaking of the southern mountain region he states: "They are museums in which have been preserved the log cabins, wooden plows, the sickle, the shuck mattresses, homemade soap, the language of 1650, the muzzle-loading rifle, and 'resentment against government restrictions.'"[14]

While such illustrations are colorful, Almack mistakes ruralism

[11] *Ibid.*, 199.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] *Ibid.*
[14] *Ibid.*

for the frontier and neglects the most vital element, the significance of the frontier as a process.

In summary, Almack, while leveling a sixteen-inch gun at the frontier, generally hits his target with the explosive power of a pea shooter. His main contributions were: (1) opening up the field for further investigation; (2) calling attention to the telling truth that American history was not shaped by any one factor but many; (3) pointing out that the American frontier was not unique. Other countries, notably Russia, have had frontiers.

Following Almack's round of fire, there seemed to be an open season on the Turner thesis. During the thirties a good deal of criticism appeared in various books and periodicals. A constant source of attack was against the uncritical assumption that the words "frontier" and "democracy" were synonymous. Even some of the orthodox Turner students turned their guns against such obvious fallacies. As Avery Craven pointed out, freedom and equality on the frontier were sometimes little more than fine sounding words. Freedom was often only a physical freedom; it rarely meant freedom to think and to act differently from the group. Freedom was at times only the liberty to do the things which everyone else did.[15]

Similarly, equality often meant nothing more than dragging the higher down to the level of the lower, a leveling force which pounded men into a common pattern. Conformity and uniformity were demanded by the group for its own protection. Individualism on the frontier, according to Carl Becker, was "that of achievement not of eccentricity; of conformity not of revolt."[16]

In addition, the frontier encouraged waste and the exploitation of natural resources, moral and political irresponsibility, and occasionally a great deal of social injustice. Craven concludes that many times democracy on the frontier meant little more than a simple fluid society and economic opportunity. However, he quickly points out that always the flavor was democratic, even though the practice was not.[17]

[15] Craven, *Democracy in American Life* (Chicago, 1941), 50.
[16] Quoted by Craven, *ibid.*, 47.
[17] *Ibid.*, 46.

In fairness to Turner, however, it should be made crystal clear that many of the ideas implicit in a liberal twentieth century concept of democracy were not applied by Turner to the frontier. One should not try to read 1946 into 1800 or even 1893. The philosophy of democracy held by Turner's generation was in many respects quite close to the political and social situations prompted by the frontier.

Shifting the question from whether the institutions on the American frontier were democratic to whether the frontier created American democracy, provides a fertile field for critical investigation. A strong criticism of the thesis is made on the grounds that it credits no other force, other than the frontier, for the promotion of American democratic institutions.[18] Turner himself contributed to this impression by such statements as the "forest philosophy is the philosophy of American democracy."[19] In another place Turner wrote: "American democracy was born of no theorist's dream, it was not carried in the 'Susan Constant' to Virginia, nor in the 'Mayflower' to Plymouth. It came out of the American forest, and it gained new strength each time it touched a new frontier." [20]

Such an interpretation, if followed blindly, ignores the elimination of feudalism in England, the development of representative government in Parliament, and does not consider the liberalizing and democratizing force of the Protestant Revolt.[21] It does not account for the seignorial system in Canada which outlasted and was at times more restrictive than the contemporary feudalism of France. The frontier thesis does not explain why the government and society of the Dutch colonies were less liberal and democratic than those of their English neighbors.[22] In short, attributing the growth and development of American democracy to the frontier alone neglects to evaluate properly the importance

[18] Benjamin Wright, Jr., "American Democracy and the Frontier," *Yale Review*, n.s., 20:349–65 (December, 1930).
[19] *Frontier in American History*, 207.
[20] *Ibid.*, 293.
[21] Wright, "American Democracy . . . ," 351.
[22] *Ibid.*, 355.

of our institutional development as an outgrowth of the evolution of Western civilization.[23]

Part and parcel of the Turner thesis was the idea that the frontier served as a safety valve for the restless, the discontented, and the unemployed. This concept was taken at its face value and was not questioned for years. However, in 1935, Carter Goodrich and Sol Davison, writing on "The Wage-Earner in the Westward Movement," disputed the presence of any substantial number of wage-earners in the Westward movement.[24] A similar conclusion was reached by Professor Kane, who held that the industrial worker could not accumulate the minimum capital necessary to exercise the privilege of taking up farmlands in the West. Holding the opposite view from that which is generally accepted, Murray Kane argued that if any migration among the industrial workers did occur, the movement took place not during periods of depression and panic, but during the upward sweep of the economic curve.[25] Professor Shannon adds weight to the revisionist approach by observing that no one has ever disproven the fact that after 1865 there were always at least 1,000,000 persons unemployed in this country.[26]

Dr. Joseph Schafer answered the critics on the validity of the safety valve theory by contending that as long as the land was not fully settled labor could not be cheap and by pointing out that even the critics (Davison and Goodrich) admitted that the frontier tended to hold up the level of industrial wages. Also by using the manuscript census, Dr. Schafer cites statistical data proving that about one-third of the Middle Western farmers around 1880 had earned their farms as laborers or craftsmen. Probably Dr. Schafer's strongest point, however, was in calling attention to the psychological effect of the safety valve which operated alike upon laborers, employers, and the general pub-

[23] *Ibid.*, 365.
[24] *Political Science Quarterly*, 50:184 (June, 1935).
[25] Murray Kane, "Some Considerations on the Safety Valve Doctrine," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 23:169–88 (September, 1936).
[26] Fred A. Shannon, "The Homestead Act and the Labor Surplus," *American Historical Review*, 16:650 (July, 1936).

lic.[27] Irrespective of whether the frontier was an actual safety valve, the people thought that it was. Myth is many times more important than fact, and perhaps the American West after the Civil War was a case at point.

In 1936 Professor Shannon wrote an article in which he disputed the common assumption, implied from the Turner thesis, that the year 1890 marked the end of the free land in the West. By June 30, 1890, according to Mr. Shannon's figures, 372,659 homestead entries had been completed, granting 48,225,736 acres of land to homesteaders—an area which was less than the size of the State of Nebraska and equal to only 3½ percent of the land west of the Mississippi River. Furthermore, four times as many acres have been given away since 1890 than were distributed before that date. As a matter of fact, since 1910 more land has been taken up than was given away in all of the previous forty-eight years of the operation of the Homestead Act.[28] Bolstering his argument that the West was not filled by 1890, Mr. Shannon cites Delaware, a state with three counties at low tide and two at high tide, as having in 1890 three times as many farms as Idaho and Montana combined, three times as many as Wyoming, seven times as many as Arizona, and eight times as many as Nevada.[29]

Even considering the extent of land under cultivation, the East led the West. Ohio alone in 1890 had twice as many acres in farms as the entire West.[30]

In the same article Professor Shannon turned the searchlight on another long accepted tenet of the Turner thesis—the availability of free land on the frontier. In discussing the operation of the Homestead Act, Mr. Shannon points out that the law did not provide any method of aiding the needy to reach the land, nor did it offer them credit or guidance during the "starving time" of early occupancy.[31] The high cost of transportation, the expensive practice of "shopping around" before settling on the final destination, the savings-consuming period before the farm was

[27] Joseph Schafer, "Was the West a Safety-Valve?" *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 24:299–14 (December, 1937).
[28] Shannon, "Homestead Act . . . ," 638.
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Ibid.*, 639.
[31] *Ibid.*, 645.

on a self-sustaining basis all contributed to the inference that the land was not really free, since it was not available. Professor Benjamin Wright also cast suspicion on the presence of free land in the West by intimating that the unoccupied land may not have been free land.[32]

Of course it might well be argued that the land on the frontier was never completely free since a person had to pay, in money or effort, for the cost of transportation. Furthermore, there was always expense involved in opening the land for cultivation; the land had to be cleared, fenced, and broken. Perhaps one had to scalp or be scalped by the Indians to retain possession of his holdings. Finally a long period of time might elapse before any appreciative return from the land was realized.

In a technical sense the above conclusions may be true. Relatively speaking the land was free when compared with real estate values in Europe and contributed materially to the reduction of the price of land everywhere.

Louis M. Hacker took a rather different and somewhat doubtful approval in his criticism of the thesis. Mr. Hacker's chief grievances were Turner's contention that America's frontier experience was unique and Turner's failure to view all of American history in terms of the growth of American capitalism, the rise of imperialism, and the development of class antagonisms.[33]

It may be that Turner overestimated the uniqueness of America's frontier experience, but it still appears as though the frontier process and the final results of this experience are unexampled. The American farmer even today has a different outlook than the European peasant, and the American millionaire certainly has a different perspective than the European aristocracy. Rugged individualism and *laissez-faire* are still powerful forces in this country. Hacker seems to neglect entirely the importance of the process by which we reached complexity. Even though the frontier which helped to mould our national character and our point of view is no longer in existence, the viewpoint and the psychology

[32] Wright, "American Democracy . . . ," 356.
[33] Louis M. Hacker, "Sections—or Classes," *Nation*, 37:108–10 (July 26, 1933).

still remain.[34] There is still much in America today which retains the frontier flavor. Indeed, sectionalism today has a greater influence over most Americans than does the appeal of class solidarity. Few Americans would care to have themselves considered as anything other than middle class. Psychologically at least, we are in general a classless society.

Turner's contention that the frontier produced specific traits and qualities in men has also been attacked. Pierson, in a stimulating article, asks the following questions and implies negative answers: (1) Is Turner's list of American traits complete, or should it be modified by addition or deletion? (2) Were the American traits due solely to the influence of the frontier? (3) Did not the frontier produce negative qualities not mentioned by Turner in his writings? (4) Are the traits which we call American really American, or are they merely human traits found in all parts of the world? (5) Were all social and racial groups equally affected by the frontier? [35]

This matter of traits and qualities which go to make up the Western mind is very controversial. Most of the writers on the West, however, would assume that it is a matter of degree rather than fundamental differences that make the Western individual unique.

To economize, the chief criticisms of the Turner thesis revolve around the following points: (1) the safety valve concept is fallacious; the West never served as a haven or refuge for distressed labor nor did the West guarantee the existence of democracy; (2) Turner wrote about the West, particularly the Middle West, neglecting such forces as labor, slavery, urbanism, and the influence of Europe; (3) Turner failed to evaluate the importance of the class struggle in America and its effect upon American history; (4) Western institutions and frontier democracy were not unique; they followed and duplicated the same patterns as those in Europe and in the settled parts of the East. Even in-

[34] These ideas are contained in Avery Craven's article, "Frederick Jackson Turner," 258.
[35] G. W. Pierson, "The Frontier and Frontiersmen in Turner's Essays; A Scrutiny of the Foundations of the Middle Western Tradition," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History*, 64:478 (October, 1940).

dividual traits in the West were not unique, but simply human traits found throughout the world and formed by other forces than frontier conditions; (5) the frontier thesis is a sectional and one-sided interpretation of American history.

In defense of Turner one must quickly point out that not all of his critics have fully understood the fundamental characteristics of the frontier. Many of them have ignored the frontier process entirely and have concentrated their attack on relatively minor details. Other critics have ignored the contradictory nature and the almost certain impossibility of generalizations. For every asset of the frontier one can point out a negative counteraction. One can say that the frontier was lawless and immoral, and yet a church was often the first building to be erected in a community. The frontier may be criticized as being unlettered and unlearned, yet few areas had more faith in the value of education. There was much idealism and even more materialism. The West worshipped success and efficiency, yet waste, exploitation, and failures were numerous; the saloon and temperance societies lived side by side; liberalism, reaction, *laissez-faire*, government aid, buoyancy, and discontent are hard to reconcile, yet all of these had their expression on the frontier; democrats became the worst kind of aristocrats when they acquired wealth; the frontiersman hated privilege, but he was not adverse to "skimming a little cream" when the occasion arose.[36]

That Turner seemed to recognize the contradictions of the West and did not repudiate them is evident in his writings on nationalism and sectionalism. Hence it would be an easy matter to take statements on either subject out of context and pose generalizations which could be easily challenged. According to Craven, Turner recognized the contributions made to American democracy by Europe at the very moment when he was insisting that democracy was not carried in the "Susan Constant" to Virginia. Turner also recognized the individualism which existed side by side with community cooperation; the hostility toward government inter-

[36] John L. Harr, *The Ante-Bellum Southwest, 1815–1861* (University of Chicago, 1941), 6.

ference coinciding with the drought-stricken farmer's demand for government aid.[37]

Nonetheless, some of the aspects of Turner's writing stand corrected and other phases require further study and exploration. It is quite likely that the West was not in actuality a safety valve for the oppressed industrial laborer after the Civil War. Moreover, it appears that Turner generalized too much for the whole West on the basis of his knowledge of the Old Northwest. He probably emphasized too strongly the peculiaristic character of the American experience, and he may have overshadowed the influence of other forces with his constant insistence on the significance of the frontier in American life and history. Undoubtedly this is true in respect to democracy. Turner did not credit sufficiently European influences in accounting for the growth and development of American democratic institutions. Finally, it appears that Turner was a bit too enthusiastic for the frontier as a character and personality "Mix-master."

A point generally obscured, however, must be kept in mind. Turner merely advanced a hypothesis, a set of new ideas which might suggest a new approach to the study of American history. Much of that which passes as the "Turner thesis" was taken up by his followers and offered to the unthinking as absolute statements of universal truths. Many of his statements were taken from their proper settings and circulated among the uncritical as gospel doctrine. Thus such ideas as the following found wide acceptance under the attractive title of the "Turner thesis": (1) the American frontier was unique; (2) all factors on the frontier encouraged and commanded nationalism and democracy; (3) every frontiersman was inventive, individualistic, idealistic, progressive, and enthusiastic. Turner recognized these discrepancies and once remarked that some of his students "apprehended only certain aspects" of his work and had not seen "them in relation" to the rest of his writing.[38]

Finally, historical writing should be reconsidered by each gen-

[37] Quoted in Craven's "Frederick Jackson Turner," 257–58.
[38] Quoted in *ibid.*, 256.

eration. Each generation should judge for itself on the basis of available information the correct evaluation of historical happenings and historical interpretation. Without doubt Turner as a historian would have been one of the first to offer amendments to his writings in view of contrary findings. It should also be remembered that Turner was suggesting a new approach, not dictating results; that he was presenting a case, not handing down a decision. Turner was simply calling attention to a field which had been long neglected; he was not attempting to restrict the field from further writing and investigation. Turner was a trail blazer, and as such he possessed the merits and shortcomings of all pioneers.

Perhaps the most intelligent solution to the controversy over Turner is that advanced by Professor John Hicks. According to Mr. Hicks, the truth lies somewhere in between the position that the frontier explains American history and the revisionist's stand that the frontier was only one factor in the development of America. Certainly during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and part of the nineteenth century the ideas which Turner wrote and spoke about were in general true, "... people did go West, there was a frontier, and it made a difference." [39] However, close on the heels of the frontier came a rising period of industrialism which also made a difference. But the historian of the future, recognizing the rightful sphere of the two forces will not attempt to "industrialize the frontier, or frontierize the industrial period." [40]

[39] John D. Hicks, "The 'Ecology' of Middle Western Historians," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 24:348 (June, 1941).
[40] *Ibid.*

# Frederick Jackson Turner

*By* MERLE E. CURTI

In choosing Frederick Jackson Turner as one of the two most eminent historians of the United States, the Council of the American Historical Association paid tribute to the scholar who in greater measure than any other in the past half-century has forced the rewriting of the national history. Of the five volumes of Turner's writings, only two deal in anything like a systematic way with specific periods in the development of the United States; and he wrote no comprehensive history of the nation. Thus the monographic and systematic writing of Turner is considerably less in scope and quantity than that of other historians who might have been chosen to stand beside Francis Parkman.[1] But in originality and in influence, Turner has thus far had no superior if he has had any peer. The fact that today one of the major controversies in the

[1] Turner's volumes, not including diplomatic documents that he edited and bibliographies that he prepared or helped prepare, are, in order of the date of publication, *Rise of the New West 1819-1829 (The American Nation: a History* ... edited by Albert Bushnell Hart, vol. 14, New York, 1906), *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920), *The Significance of the Sections in American History* (New York, 1932), *The United States 1830-1850: The Nation and its Sections* (New York, 1935), and *The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1938), with a List of all his Works compiled by Everett E. Edwards and an Introduction by Fulmer Mood. The bibliography of Turner's writings in this volume includes the large number of essays and reviews that he wrote.

scholarship of United States history centers in Turner's frontier thesis supports rather than detracts from the statement regarding the seminal character of his ideas and the far-reaching influence of his writing and teaching.

Important reasons for the high rank Turner holds in United States historiography are to be found in the problems that he chose for investigation, in the methods by which he broadened and deepened historical research, in the interpretations of his findings, in his inspirational teaching, and in the influence of his work on public thought and even on public action. He who understands the vogue of Turner's ideas understands in large part the chief movements of thought and feeling in the past seventy years.

But even more important than all these is the amazing array of suggestive ideas for investigation that Turner set forth. Virtually no major field of research in the national history, virtually no leading interpretation or approach that others have explored, can be pointed to which Turner did not anticipate. This is true, for example, of such themes, cultivated and reported on by others, as the industrial revolution, capitalism, labor, class conflicts, immigration, urbanization, cultural achievements, physiography, and the social uses of historical knowledge in the arena of public action. It is worth emphasizing the point that at the outset of his career Turner urged the study of the United States in terms of world history. He insisted at the start on the necessity of taking account of the contributions of Europe to American development and of the impact in turn of America on the rest of the world.[2]

[2] See in particular his two early essays, "The Significance of History" (1891) and "Problems in American History" (1892) reprinted in *The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner* and the prescient and stimulating address given on his retirement as president

Though he did not develop these themes in his publications, neither did he ignore them in his investigations and teaching; and he encouraged students to explore them. His students who later went into European history, including Carl L. Becker and Guy Stanton Ford, were equally indebted to him.

In view, then, of Turner's pioneer contributions in giving the study of American history an economic and social base, of bringing it into a close working alliance with geography, demography, sociology, and other social sciences, and of suggesting a great many fertile approaches and themes, it is unwarrantable to regard him as important merely as the father and sponsor of the frontier interpretation of American history. His name, it is true, has been so intimately associated with that thesis that it must be given due prominence. But the point to emphasize today is that the frontier thesis was but one aspect of Turner's work.

## I

By early environment Frederick Jackson Turner came to know at first hand something of the great march of civilization that pushed the wilderness ever westward. He was born in Portage, Wisconsin, on November 14, 1861. His father, Andrew Jackson Turner and his mother, Mary Hanford Turner, were pioneers who had come to Wisconsin from upstate New York. From them and from neighbors young Turner heard many stories of the Indians, the fur traders, and the loggers that preceded the development

of the American Historical Association, "Social Forces in American History," *American Historical Review,* vol. 16, pp. 217 *ff* (January 1911).

of the settled community in which he lived. Portage itself was on the edge of country still largely wilderness. On fishing and hunting excursions young Turner saw Indians pitching their tepees and witnessed other survivals of the frontier. In his day by day life he came to know all sorts of people of many national backgrounds, living together with a give and take and with every indication of rapidly becoming Americans. The life of Portage was also thoroughly democratic in its social relations. Turner's father, a local politician, newspaper editor, and historian, was much interested in the transformation of the area from a borderland frontier area to a settled farming community. It is obvious that such an environment, simple, democratic, and on the edge of the wilderness, provided a natural setting for the development in a sensitive youth of an interest in the process by which civilization replaced the forest life of Indians, trappers, and furtraders.[3]

But Turner's boyhood comrades, subjected to the same experiences of the departing borderland life, did not become historians of the westward movement. An all-important step in Turner's development was the decision to attend the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Here he received a thorough classical training. The sensitiveness to literary style thus cultivated was another foundation for Turner's later career. His fluid and balanced sentences, his liking for the apt epithet, owed something to his classical studies.

The University of Wisconsin was a small, democratic institution, presided over by President John Bascom, a versatile scholar, and, for his day, a progressive thinker on social and economic issues. Bascom preached the duty

[3] This is based in part on an autobiographical letter of Turner, published in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, vol. 19, pp. *96 ff.* (Sept. 1935).

of University students to improve the state which made their higher education possible, by using the knowledge thus acquired for the public good. From President Bascom, from other scholars, and from the type of student life that prevailed, Turner was confirmed in the democratic outlook on life that Portage had given him. In two orations, one given in his junior year, and one at his commencement in 1884, Turner expounded his faith in democracy and in a democratic culture.

In one he called for and predicted the appearance of a great epic poet of American democracy. In the other he declared that the world was at last beginning to see that true progress required the enlightenment of all. He had no fear that the utilitarian American democracy would ruin the artistic heritage of the past. It would, on the contrary Turner insisted, provide for a much greater and richer artistic development: for the squalor of the hovel would no longer mar the beauty of the cathedral. In this emphasis on the functional, democratic interpretation of art and culture, Turner was breaking with the traditional view that associated great achievements in the arts with a privileged order.[4]

At the University of Wisconsin Turner came into close contact not only with cultural democracy but with modern science. In the orations just mentioned the young undergraduate spoke in the most appreciative terms of science. This he associated with both democracy and progress. From his teachers in biology and geology he learned of the scientific method that was working a revolution in man's knowledge of the external world. It was a natural step to apply the principle of the inductive study of nat-

[4] "The Poet of the Future" and "Architecture through Oppression" in the *University Press*, vol. 14, p. 4 (May 26, 1883) and vol. 15, p. 12 (June 21, 1884).

ural phenomena to the inductive study of historical data —a step we shall see him taking under the tutelage of two historians who were pioneers in the United States in the scientific study of history. From Thomas C. Chamberlin, the eminent geologist who presided as president over the University in the years of Turner's graduate studies, he heard of the multiple hypothesis. The development of the earth, Chamberlin held, was too many-sided, too complicated, to be approached by any single hypothesis. It could be understood only through considering multiple hypotheses, each of which was constantly to be tested by the evidence of the data in as detached a way as possible. Turner took to heart this idea and often illustrated it in his later teaching.

As a student at the University of Wisconsin Turner also learned of the doctrine of evolution, at that time still highly controversial. Under the spell of his professor of history, in true evolutionary terms he conceived of society as an ever growing organism: history was merely the self-consciousness of that organism. The roots of the present, whether the focus of attention were a rock, or a flower, or an animal, or a society, lay deep in the past; and development took place without any break. Thus Turner, thanks to the intellectual currents he met as a student, was prepared to apply to the study of society the concept of development from stage to stage by struggle and adaptation.

One of the most remarkable exemplars in America of the scientific approach to the study of the past was William F. Allen, professor of history at Wisconsin. Trained at the Harvard and the German universities of the mid-nineteenth century, Allen taught his students, in the manner of a scientist, the critical evaluation of the evidence in primary sources. This was highly unusual at the time, for

most American teachers of history emphasized the mastery of the facts in a historical manual. In addition Allen set great store on economic and cultural factors in history. Here again he was a pioneer, for in the United States of the time the emphasis was almost exclusively on political and constitutional history. Again, in the spirit of Heeren, under whose spell he had fallen in Germany, Allen emphasized the interrelations of America and Europe. What was more, he acquainted his students with the large problems rather than with the bare isolated facts —the stock in trade of most historians. He likewise made much use of geographical maps. Allen's special interest was Roman history, in the teaching of which he called attention to the expansion of Roman civilization outward and to the movement of peoples. This transplanted Easterner was further a pioneer in emphasizing the importance of the West in American development.[5] There is no doubt that he profoundly influenced Turner. It was the inspiration of Allen that decided the young scholar to give up journalism, in which he spent a profitable year or so, and to become a professional historian. In later years he testified that whatever he had achieved he owed to Professor Allen.

Under Allen's guidance Turner prepared from the rich collection of manuscripts at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin an essay on "The Character and Influence of the Fur Trade in Wisconsin". This fulfilled the requirement for the degree Master in Arts, which he was awarded in 1888. The study reflected an evolutionary approach to the material, thus exemplifying the impact

[5] Allen's writings are in part available in *Essay and Monographs by William Francis Allen: Memorial Volume,* edited by David B. Frankenburger and others, (Boston, 1890). On Allen see the *Proceeding of the Thirty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin,* 1889 (Madison, 1890), pp. 79-89.

of natural science on the young historian. In like manner Turner's article on Wisconsin, prepared for the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica,* was outstanding in developing the theme in terms of the evolution of a complex, specialized economy and culture from a simple society.

In the year 1888 - 1889 Turner went to the Johns Hopkins University, the mecca of young Americans seeking advanced training in their own country. At Baltimore he studied with and became a friend of Woodrow Wilson, whose historical work he was to influence; he attended the lectures of the sociologist, Albion Small, which may have confirmed him in his sociological approach to history; and he worked under Richard T. Ely, the American exponent of the historical approach in economics. Turner also studied with Herbert Baxter Adams, the best-known university teacher of history at the time. Like Allen, Adams also viewed the development of the present from the past in evolutionary terms. But to him heredity was far more important than environment. In the view of Adams, American institutions could be understood only in terms of their European antecedents or "germs", particularly the political forms that prevailed among the early Teutonic tribes.

To young Turner all this was unsatisfactory. Admitting that the similarities America shared with Europe were inherited, what of the differences? These could be explained only in terms of environment. The crude, unsettled wilderness must have forced the Europeans who came to America to adapt their institutions to new conditions.

Several factors explain Turner's position. He had seen the shaping influence of the borderland in his own Wis-

consin community, and in his study of the fur trade of his native state. Sectional pride also led Turner to reject the Adams thesis of the "germ theory" origin of American institutions. Turner's West was at the very moment protesting with much sectional self-consciousness against domination by the East. Turner, taking pride in his section, was thus of no mind to reject its history as negligible. Besides, he was in revolt against the antiquarian nature of historical writing on the West. In reviewing Theodore Roosevelt's *Winning of the West* he had taken exception to the emphasis on colorful Indian fighting and had insisted that a larger story of westward migration was yet to be told. Likewise the voluminous publications of H. H. Bancroft in California seemed divorced from the central movements of national history, fragmentary and episodical.

In rejecting the prevalent historical interpretations of the history of his country, Turner was expressing a deeply felt nationalism as well as a deeply felt sectionalism. For the Civil War and Reconstruction were now of the past, and the rising generation was fully aware of the great power of the nation, of its potential role on the world stage. Hence, any theory of American history that regarded civilization in America as a mere extension, a bare replica of that in the Old World, hardly answered the emotional needs of young patriots like Turner. In any case, in his expanded and rewritten master's essay which he presented for the doctorate at Johns Hopkins, Turner made only slight concessions to the Adams "germ theory" of American institutions. His study did to be sure trace fur trading institutions back to Phoenicia and Rome; but the text made it plain that the raw environment of the frontier chiefly shaped fur trading in Wisconsin.

The death of Professor Allen in 1889 led to the ap-

pointment of Turner as his successor. He was now well enough prepared to go ahead on his own power, to realize his potentialities. It is noteworthy that in his first research seminar he chose for investigation the movement of immigrant groups into Wisconsin. This choice testified to his conviction that American history could not be separated from that of Europe. The investigations in the seminar called attention anew to the role of cheap lands in attracting immigrants. At the same time Turner announced a course new in the annals of historical teaching —one on the economic and social development of the United States.

## II

In 1891 Turner announced his historical credo in a remarkable essay, "The Significance of History." [6] This was prepared to show the usefulness of historical study in the new program of University Extension classes that President Chamberlin was launching. The essay was a historiographical declaration of independence. Turner rejected the dominant emphasis on political and institutional history. He also denied the objective and permanently truthful and adequate character of even the best historical scholarship. In this essay Turner boldly declared "each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time." If this was the case, then historians must learn to discard the idea that there are "standard ultimate histories." Here we find Turner anticipating the recent emphasis that Carl Becker, Charles A. Beard and others have put on the relativity of

[6] This essay is reprinted in *The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1938), pp. 43-68.

historical knowledge —on the frame of reference concept. A tribal history, Turner went on, was good enough for a tribal people; but for a modern complicated society with world orientations, only a comparative and comprehensive approach, indeed a world approach to the nation's past, was adequate if history was to illuminate the present. The study of the history of the United States was still, he argued, in the tribal phase. "Our history is to be understood as a growth from European history under the new conditions of the New World. How shall we understand American history without understanding European history?" From the history of other peoples Americans might surely learn useful lessons.

But Turner was even more the innovator in declaring that the uppermost questions of the day flowed from the new age of machinery, the factory system, and socialism. Thus the historian must understand property relations, the distribution of wealth, the influence of world-wide conditions, "the whole economic base of society". The time had come when the country could no longer be content with ignorance of how the present had come about. In defending historical studies in an institution of higher learning maintained by public funds, Turner held that only through an historical approach to the great current political, social, and economic issues could citizens and statesmen be trained to deal competently with these problems.

Turner was here presenting a view later to be popularized by Professor James Harvey Robinson and others under the term "the new history." This insisted, among other things, on the usefulness of historical knowledge as an instrument for effective living in a modern, complex society. Nor were these mere words, for Turner took the lead in establishing at the University of Wisconsin the

new School of Economics, Political Science and History. At Turner's suggestion Richard T. Ely was brought from the Johns Hopkins University to help in the undertaking. Within no time the School was a leading center for the training of scholars in public policy and administration.[7]

The rich philosophical content and prophetic eloquence of this manifesto were sustained in a new essay that appeared the following year in a University publication. This was called "Problems in American History." The foremost authority on Turner, Dr. Fulmer Mood, has said that in this essay the historian "for the first time in print put his finger upon the material cause, the fundamental economic factor, that he was to stress in his interpretation of our history." What was that fundamental factor? In Turner's own words, it was this: "In a sense, American history up to our own day has been colonial history, the colonization of the great West. *This ever retreating frontier of free land is the key to American development.*"

The essay was "proof that Turner had evolved from a student of local or regional history into a student of national and continental history." [8] He gathered dry details that would have been dust in other men's hands and moulded them into flashing incisive generalizations that illuminated a subject and a student's mind to their far horizons.

In truth "Problems in American History" laid down the program of a whole new historiographical school. To quote Fulmer Mood again, "it served notice on those who read it that a revolution had taken place in American his-

[7] Merle Curti and Vernon Carstensen, *The University of Wisconsin, a History* (Madison, 1949, 2 vols.) vol. 1, pp. 630-641.

[8] Fulmer Mood, "Turner's Formative Period," in the *Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner*, p. 38.

toriography." The revolution, briefly, was outlined in certain broad propositions. First, Turner insisted on the necessity of looking behind institutions and constitutional forms to discover "the vital forces that call these organs into life and shape them to meet changing conditions." In terms reminiscent of the evolutionist he declared that "the peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they are compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of a remarkably developing, expanding people. The institutional framework of the nation may be likened to the anatomy of the body politic; its physiology is the social and economic life moulding this framework to new uses. Here it is that we find the field for widest study."

The second proposition was that American history in this broader sense could no longer be pursued with conventional tools and materials. In calling for the "thorough study of the physiographic basis of our history" Turner indicated that the geologist, the biologist, the meteorologist, and the historian must join hands and predicted that such a cooperative approach would show "how largely American history has been determined by natural conditions."

The third proposition reminded the reader that natural environment, however important, was not the sole determining factor. For Turner again insisted that European life had entered the American continent and profoundly influenced it; he again declared that America in turn had "modified that life and reacted on Europe."

Fourth, Turner declared that sight must not be lost of the process by which the sectionalization of the Atlantic coast was extended westward with constant modifications of the older culture by new conditions. This process was to be investigated. The historian must discover

and explain the distinctive characteristics of the sections, including the moving section that could be described at any moment in time as the West. Nor could he neglect the interplay of these sections on each other and their impact on national development. Such a study, he continued, involved learning more about the Indian, about immigration from Europe, about the distribution of immigrants in the sections, and about the interstate migration of the native born. Turner ended the essay on a striking note: "What the Mediterranean Sea was to the Greeks, breaking the bond of custom, offering new experiences, calling out new institutions and activities, that the ever retreating Great West has been to the eastern United States directly, and to the nations of Europe more remotely." [9]

## III

In some of the most brilliant essays in American historiography Fulmer Mood has shown how Turner arrived at this conception of American history and how it came to be amplified in 1893 in the famous paper Turner read before the American Historical Association.[10] We may

[9] *Early Writings*, p. 83.

[10] In addition to the essay already cited, "Turner's Formative Period," see "The Development of Frederick Jackson Turner as an Historical Thinker," Colonial Society of Massachusetts, vol. 34, Dec. 1939, pp. 283 *ff.*, "The Historiographic Setting of Turner's Frontier Essay," *Agricultural History*, vol. 17, pp. 153-155 (July, 1943), "The Concept of the Frontier, 1871-1898," *Agricultural History*, vol. 19, pp. 24-30, Jan. 1945, and "Notes on the History of the Word *Frontier*," *Agricultural History*, vol. 22, pp. 78-83, April, 1948. Dr. Mood is now engaged in writing a biography of Turner. For another discussion of antecedents of Turner's discovery of the importance of the frontier see Herman Clarence Nixon, "Precursors of Turner in the Interpretation of the American Frontier," *South Atlantic Quarterly*,

merely here remind ourselves that in the later stages of the process Turner owed much to the Bureau of Census and to certain historical atlases. These developed a picture of the westward moving population, decade by decade, of the resultant conquest of woodland, prairies, deserts, and mountains by the westward advance of population, and of the importance of physiographic areas in this process. Turner, in reading a new bulletin of the Census Bureau was struck by the statement that "up to and including 1880 the country had a frontier of settlement, but at present the unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line. In the discussion of its extent, its westward movement, etc., it cannot, therefore, any longer have a place in the census reports." Turner had the remarkable gift of insight and generalization: in terms of his background and studies, this dry, official announcement which most historians would have passed over had it come their way, struck him as highly significant: an era of American history had now ended. He inevitably made this the point of departure in the paper he prepared for the American Historical Association at its meeting in Chicago in connection with the World's Columbian Exposition.

In this famous essay, marked by poetic cadences and vivid imagery Turner began with the bold statement that "the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development." Thus American development was chiefly the beginning over again of civilization in unoccupied areas, the evolution of society from the

vol. 28, pp. 83-89, (Jan. 1929); Nixon shows that Jefferson, Emerson, Tocqueville, E. L. Godkin, and Bryce, among other, anticipated Turner.

simple to the complex. Each new region recapitulated the experiences of former frontiers: the explorer, the hunter and trapper, the trader, the rancher, and the pioneer farmer followed one the other. As the region was transformed from one of pioneer farmers into one of specialized farmers and manufacturers, into a region with many towns and cities, it ceased to be frontier country.

In this essay as in later writings, the frontier meant primarily the region of sparse settlement to the west of settled areas, "the meeting point between savagery and civilization." At times, to be sure, Turner used the term in the sense of the line itself, on maps, that separated areas inhabited by less than two persons to the square mile from those more densely settled; at other times he spoke of the frontier as the process itself of civilization marching westward into unoccupied areas; and on occasion he referred to it as a state of mind. The richness of the land and its relative cheapness and availability was the magnet, the desire on the part of the potential frontiersman to better his lot in life was the principal motive for moving into unoccupied or slightly settled areas.

Turner was more concerned in this essay with the meaning of the frontier process than with the process itself, though in later researches much attention was paid to the actual occupation. He maintained that the process of colonization of the new lands chiefly explained the growth of American democracy and of American nationalism.

By democracy Turner meant the democracy of Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln, the democracy that meant equality of opportunity to compete for the natural resources of the unoccupied or sparsely occupied land, the democracy of political participation and decision-making by

all adult male citizens, the democracy that concerned itself with the well-being of the common man. It was the frontier movement that transformed the democracy of Jefferson into that of Jackson and Lincoln. As long as free land existed, the opportunity for a competency existed: the widely based economic power secured a widely based political power. Turner also saw in the democratizing effects of the westward movement the reenforcing of democracy not only in the older areas of the East but in Europe itself.

In Turner's view the democratizing effects of the colonization of the land between the Atlantic and the Pacific were closely associated with the growth of nationalism, by which he meant the consolidation of sections into the nation, the increasing powers and functions of the central government, and the development of an American self-consciousness. The frontier, he declared, was the line of the most effective and rapid Americanization both of the Old World immigrants and of the native-born peoples of the older sections that settled in it. In the new country the habits, loyalties, and views of Europe, of New England, and of the long-settled Middle and Southern Atlantic regions were gradually replaced by new or modified ones. The frontier, in short, promoted the formation of a composite nationality, for the constant re-exposure to the demands of beginning over again stamped American characteristics on those who colonized the new country. The advancing settlements moreover lessened dependence on England, accentuated the powers of the central government which alone was equal to the task of providing protection against Indians, subsidizing roads, canals, and railroads, and allocating land. Turner also believed that legislation for tariffs as well as for internal

improvements and land policy necessitated a broad or loose construction of those clauses in the federal constitution dealing with the powers of the central government. Finally, the westward movement, he argued, developed the essentially American traits of restless energy, self-reliance, voluntary cooperation on the part of individuals, practical ingenuity and versatility, inventiveness, and a masterful grasp of material things, developed in short the individualism, strength, readiness to innovate, and earthy practicality that Europeans described as characteristically American.

Turner was intrigued by the implications of the Census Bureau announcement in 1891 that it was no longer possible to describe on the map a frontier line separating settled from unsettled areas. But he expressed the faith of the late nineteenth century western mind that the qualities born of the frontier, above all its individualistic democracy, constituted a permanent heritage to the nation. In the survival of frontier ideals in the new America of concentrated economic power, Turner believed his countrymen possessed an instrument well designed to meet the issues of an industrial economy. Under the influence of Populism and Progressivism, in many respects middle western movements, he looked to the government to find equivalents for the vanished opportunity implicit in the bygone era of free lands.

In advocating state supported social services later liberal leaders, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, maintained that a democratic politically controlled adjustment must take the place of the earlier equal competition for a share of the nation's natural resources.[11] Yet

[11] Curtis Nettels, "Frederick Jackson Turner and the New Deal," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, vol. 17, pp. 257-265, March, 1934. See for further illustrations of the point Rex Tugwell, "No

in combatting the social legislation of the New Deal conservatives argued that such quasi-collectivism ran counter to the characteristically American heritage of individualism and self reliance.[12] Thus the Turner interpretation of the frontier process was a two-edged instrument used by publicists and politicians in advocating conflicting views on legislation.

In considering the social and political implications of the frontier theory we may note its bearings on conceptions of foreign policy. Anti-imperialists and isolationists have sometimes argued that overseas expansion would ruin the democracy born of frontier experience. But a larger number held that the disappearance of free lands at home compelled the United States to seek equivalents in colonialism overseas. Turner himself looked with favor on the movement for oceanic expansion at the time of the Spanish-American War. But it was also possible for the Turner school to contend that the give and take of the frontier, the mutual cooperation it had stimulated, its harmonization of different peoples, provided a pattern for a larger cooperation between nations.[13]

The frontier theory not only influenced political leaders and students of United States history. Medievalists compared western movements in America with the expansion of the German people into the forest lands of east-

More Frontiers," *Today,* vol. 4, pp. 3-4, June 22, 1935, and Henry A. Wallace, *New Frontiers* (New York, 1934).

[12] James Truslow Adams, "Rugged Individualism Analyzed," *New York Times Magazine,* pp. 1-2, 11, (March 8, 1934).

[13] Frederick L. Paxson, *When the West is Gone* (New York, 1930), pp. 134-136. It is noteworthy that Turner prepared for Woodrow Wilson a memorandum on the possible lessons of American frontier and sectional experience for making the League of Nations effective. See *American Historical Review,* vol. 47, pp. 545-551 (April 1942).

central Europe.[14] Historians of Canada [15] and Latin America [16] examined the relevance of the frontier concept in their own national histories. Students of American law[17] and religion[18] found it a useful key. Literary historians applied it in their field.[19] It became, in brief, a widely used concept in humanistic and social science scholarship.

Until the 1930's few historians seriously challenged the frontier thesis. From that decade to the present, however, it has been subjected to increasing criticism. Some have taken Turner to task for a loose and inconsistent use of such terms as frontier, democracy, and nationalism.[20] Others have regarded the frontier thesis as an over-simplification that violates "the fundamental principles of social

[14] James Westfall Thompson, "Profitable Fields of Investigation in Medieval History," *American Historical Review*, vol. 18, pp. 490 *ff.* (April, 1913).

[15] Walter N. Sage, "Some Aspects of the Frontier in Canadian Thinking," *Annual Report of the Canadian Historical Association*, 1928, pp. 62-73, and Morris Zaslow, "The Frontier Hypothesis in Recent Historiography," *Canadian Historical Review*, XXIX (June 1948) pp. 158-166.

[16] Victor Andrés Belaúnde, "The Frontier in Hispanic America," *Rice Institution Pamphlets*, vol. 10, pp. 202-213 (October 1923).

[17] Roscoe Pound, *The Spirit of the Common Law* (Boston, 1921).

[18] Peter George Mode, *The Frontier Spirit in American Christianity* (New York, 1923); Henry K. Rowe, *The History of Religion in the United States* (New York, 1924), and William W. Sweet, *The Story of Religions in America* (New York, 1930).

[19] Among the literary historians influenced by the frontier thesis were Dorothy Dondore, *The Prairie and the Making of Middle America* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1926), Lucy Lockwood Hazard, *The Frontier in American Literature* (New York, 1927), and Percy H. Boynton, *The Discovery of the Frontier* (Chicago, 1931).

[20] George Wilson Pierson, "The Frontier and Frontiersmen in Turner's Essays," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 44, pp. 449-478, October 1940, "The Frontier and American Institutions," *New England Quarterly*, vol. 15, pp. 224-255, June, 1942, and "Recent Studies of Turner and the Frontier Doctrine," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 34, pp. 453-458, (December 1947).

causation as the complex product of the unique interaction of multiple causes." [21] Still others insisted that the frontier did little to promote democracy and social innovation, that the East and Europe were in much greater degree responsible for both.[22] Certain historians have held that the frontier thesis was an agrarian interpretation of American history that failed to give sufficient emphasis to the industrial revolution, urbanization, and basic class antagonisms and conflicts.[23] Carlton J. H. Hayes has recently gone so far as to attribute to the frontier thesis the intellectual isolationism of the United States —has insisted that the emphasis placed on it by historians has turned the public eye away from Europe, of which our history has been an integral part.[24] We shall not try to evaluate these criticisms or to estimate the degree to which they have been accepted in professional circles. It seems clear that in

[21] James C. Malin, "Space and History," *Agricultural History,* vol. 18, April 1944, pp. 65-67, and *The Grassland of North America* (Lawrence, Kansas).

[22] Benjamin F. Wright, Jr., "American Democracy and the Frontier," *Yale Review,* vol. 20, December 1930, pp. 349-365 and "Political Institutions and the Frontier," in Dixon Ryan Fox, ed., *Sources of Culture in the Middle West* (New York, 1934), pp. 15-38.

[23] Charles A. Beard, "Culture and Agriculture," *Saturday Review of Literature,* vol. 5, October 20, 1928, pp. 272-273 and "The Frontier in American History," *New Republic,* vol. 25, February 16, 1921; Louis M. Hacker, "Sections or Classes?" *Nation,* vol. 137, July 26,1933, pp. 349-350, pp. 108-111 and review of Turner's *The United States 1830-1850* in *The New Republic,* vol. 83, June 5, 1935, p. 108. Closely associated with this general criticism is that concerned with the so-called safety-valve which Turner suggested and which some of his followers developed. This maintained that the availability of cheap land in the West alleviated economic discontent in Europe. Among the many critics of the theory the most thoroughgoing has been Fred A. Shannon, "A Post Mortem on the Labor-Safety-Valve Theory," *Agricultural History,* vol. 19, Jan. 1945, pp. 27-37.

[24] Carlton J. H. Hayes, "The American Frontier—Frontier of What?", *American Historical Review,* vol. 51, January 1946, pp. 199-210.

its extreme form, the frontier thesis is no longer tenable,[25] and that more exact analysis and definition are needed. But the last word has not yet been said.

## IV

Almost from the first Turner, preoccupied as he was with his studies of geographical atlases, saw the frontier as a sort of moving section. Thus it was a natural step, taken tentatively at the very time he was formulating the frontier concept, for him to emphasize sectionalism as the second and no less important key to American development. As we have seen, he called in his essay of 1892 for a thorough study of the physiographic regions of the United States. "The evolution of sections in our history," he wrote, "is a far deeper fact than the development of state particularism, for whatever force the latter had came in large degree from its association with sectionalism." [26] The Middle Atlantic section, he continued, had been studied much less than either New England or the South Atlantic section; and he urged not only the investigation of these but an exploration of the extension of these, as well as of New England, into the West. "The vast spaces into

[25] For the status of the frontier theory in professional circles in 1941 see George Wilson Pierson, "American Historian and the Frontier Hypothesis in 1941," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, vol. 26 (Sept. and Dec. 1942). For a balanced statement by one of Turner's students see Avery O. Craven, "Frederick Jackson Turner," in the *Marcus W. Jernegan Essays in American Historiography*, William T. Hutchinson, ed. (Chicago, 1937). Robert E. Riegel, *America Moves West* (New York, 1947), A. Billington, *Westward Expansion* (New York, 1949) chap. 11 are thoughtful, balanced statements.

[26] *Early Writings*, p. 27. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Section in American History," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, vol. 8, March 1935.

which the American people moved were themselves a complex of physiographic regions," he wrote later. These physiographic regions, with the type of peoples moving into them, developed into sections; and these "natural, economic, and social sections" were fundamental in explaining American development. In Turner's mind they were in truth comparable to the nations and empires of Europe, each having produced its typical leaders, attitudes, and cultures. "Interacting with each other and in combination they formed the United States." Turner proceeded in his researches to trace the colonization of these areas, their makeup and characteristics, their relations with one another and with the central government and the nation as a whole. In detailed studies he explained how and why the migrations from the older to the newer sections took place, and what followed therefrom. In large degree he came to interpret American political history in terms of "a contest between the economic and social sections". Rival sections made alliances, for no one could by itself determine national policy to suit its needs, whether in regard to tariff, land policy, currency, internal improvements, or foreign relations. Interprovincial relations were complicated by the existence of subsections within the larger sections: this explained political "straddling" and the restraints under which leaders often acted.[27]

In the pursuit of his interest in sections Turner published in 1906 his first major work —*The Rise of the New West 1819-1829*. This analyzed nationalism and sectionalism as major forces in the period, presented characterizations —economic, political, social and cultural of the principal sections, New England, the Middle Region, the

[27] Turner's essays on sectionalism were collected in *The Significance of Sections in American History* (New York, 1932).

South, the Middle West, and the Far West. The volume further explained party politics, tariff agitation, presidential elections, economic depression, internal improvements, nullification, and even the Monroe Doctrine largely in terms of sectional drives and ententes. The book, which was a pioneer study, has become a historical classic. Turner published from time to time penetrating essays on various aspects of American sectionalism: these were collected and published as a volume in 1932.

During his later years Turner pushed his researches forward into the period following that covered in *The Rise of the New West.* The same thesis, the significance of the sections in the larger national patterns, provided the key to these investigations. The book on which he labored so long was unfinished when he died, but under the auspices of friendly hands it was prepared for the press and published in 1935. It bore the title *The United States: the Nation and the Sections 1830-1850.* Each section was dealt with separately; the economic, social, political, and cultural developments of each were examined and interpreted, with a wealth of new material, shrewd insights, and brilliant characterizations of sectional leaders. The interrelations of the sections during the period, and their impact on the nation, concluded the volume. While the reception of this book was not entirely favorable, competent historians regarded it as an important contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the period it dealt with.

The sectional interpretation of American history has been no less influential than the frontier thesis. In the work of such students of Turner as Louis Pelzer, Solon J. Buck, L. K. Mathews, U. B. Phillips, C. H. Ambler, Joseph A. Schafer, Herbert E. Bolton, H. C. Hockett, J. A. James, E. M. Coulter, Clarence Carter, Arthur Darling, Avery O. Craven, Frederick Merk and others it has borne

rich fruits. Leading historians, not pupils of students, have testified with William E. Dodd to their indebtedness to Turner in their own section studies. Yet the sectional theme has also met with criticisms. To some it appeared, like the frontier concept, to obscure the importance of class cleavages within physiographical areas. Others have looked on it as no less a temporary phenomenon than the frontier itself. Although Turner recognized that sectional rivalries weakened as intercommunication and standardization increased, and as a national technological culture swept over the land, he did not concede that sectionalism was dying out. "The triumph of Bolshevism or capitalism", he observed in his later years, "would still leave a contest of sections." [28] Sectional rivalries have indeed continued; but the more recent development of the concept of regionalism and regional planning has given the whole matter a new orientation.

## V

In the years that followed the Chicago address of 1893 —the address on the significance of the frontier which quickly gave Turner a national reputation— he continued to investigate the frontier process and the history of sectionalism. To his seminars at the University of Wisconsin came young men and women from all over the country. In a series of notable doctoral dissertations many aspects of the colonization of the west were studied: transportation (L. H. Haney, B. H. Meyer, E. A. Johnson); the influence of the public lands (H. B. Hibbard, G. M. Stephenson, A. C. Ford, R. G. Wellington); im-

[28] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of Sectionalism in American History* (New York, 1932), p. 338.

migration (Kate Everest, and, later G. M. Stephenson, and Marcus Hansen); the influence of the west on the constitutional development of the federal government (H. C. Hockett, O. G. Libby and others). Turner himself published investigations of western constitution making and of the influence of the west on foreign policy. A new school of history testified to the appeal of the Turner approach.

The indefatigable research of the master and his devotion to his students did not prevent him from taking a leading part in University affairs. He built up one of the strongest centers for the study of American history, perhaps the strongest American center, a department in which specialists began to explore the history of the different sections. In addition to stimulating graduate studies in the University as a whole Turner lent a hand in the extension movement which disseminated knowledge among the plain people of the state and in the development of specialized educational services to government agencies, a two-fold expression of an ideal of service to the people which came to be known as the Wisconsin Idea. It may be worth noting that he also fought the increasingly professional character of intercollegiate athletics. In 1910, the year he served as president of the American Historical Association, Turner enterd a new phase in his career by accepting a professorship at Harvard. At that center of learning he continued to attract able students —Marcus Hansen, who was to become the leading authority on the history of American immigration, A. P. Whitaker, well known to Latin Americanists, and James B. Hedges, were only a few.* He deepened and extended his own research-

* The name of Professor Curti himself should be added to this list. Editorial note.

es. In 1924 Turner retired from Harvard and after a brief residence in Madison, Wisconsin, accepted an invitation to become research associate at the newly established Henry E. Huntington Library at San Marino, California. In 1932 at the age of seventy-one he died, at Pasadena, California.

Turner was one of the great teachers of his time. He was not a polished formal lecturer: his generous use of maps and slides and his spontaneity prevented his lectures from having the finished, systematic character that marked some historical lecturers. Yet his rich, vibrant, melodious voice was always impressive, and his broad humanism, his flair for the picturesque note and phrase, and above all the poetic touch he brought to the lectures, distinguished his presentation. Above all he possessed the rare gift of inspiring students, of imbuing them with a deep love of his subject and a belief in its great importance.[29]

In his research seminars Turner achieved his greatest success as a teacher. It was his custom to take a limited period and to suggest closely related subjects to his students. His comments were always illuminating and per-

[29] Among the students who have written of Turner as a teacher, attention may be called to the essay of Avery O. Craven, already cited, Louise Phelps Kellogg, "The Passing of a Great Teacher," *Historical Outlook,* vol. 23, pp. 270-272, October 1932. Edgar E. Robinson, "Frederick Jackson Turner," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly,* vol. 6, July 1932, pp. 259-261, Joseph Schafer, "The Author of the Frontier Hypothesis," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* vol. 15, pp. 86-103, Sept. 1931, Edward Everett Dale, "Memories of Frederick Jackson Turner," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* vol. 30, pp. 339-358, Dec. 1943, and Merle Curti, "The Section and Frontier in American History," Stuart Rice, ed., *Methods in Social Science* (Chicago, 1931), pp. 353-367. See also Max Farrand, a devoted admirer, "Frederick Jackson Turner at the Huntington Library," *Huntington Library Bulletin,* no. 3, pp. 157-164, Feb. 1933.

tinent and alive. Often they were shrewd and pungent. He could be and was critical of the work of his students; but his way of making them comrades in the quest of truth challenged them to put forth their best efforts. His extraordinary generosity with both his time and his ideas endeared him to those that knew him. An outofdoors man, simple, straightforward, yet perceptive and urbane, he possessed a keen, twinkling eye, a youthful vitality and an enthusiasm that remained with him almost to the end. So did his sense of humor. Few that knew him were ever the same thereafter.

Of the many students that have testified to their indebtedness to Turner, Carl Becker, one of the most distinguished of the men he trained, has admirably summarized Turner's greatness. "Three qualities of the man's mind made a profound and indelible impression," Becker wrote. "These qualities were: a lively and irrepressible intellectual curiosity; a refreshing freedom from personal preoccupations and didactic motives; a quite unusual ability to look out upon the wide world in a humane and friendly way, with a vision unobscured by academic inhibitions." [30]

Before leaving the subject of Turner as a teacher, it may be well to note briefly the original and distinctive methods he brought to historical research. He was among the first, if not the first, historian to study the present in order to find clues to the past. He early saw that if history was really to explain how the present had developed from the past, it was necessary to use the data and methods of economics, sociology, psychology, biology, phy-

[30] Carl L. Becker, "Frederick Jackson Turner," in Howard W. Odum, ed., *American Masters of Social Science* (New York, 1927), chap. 9. This essay is eloquent and witty, and profoundly sincere.

siography, and geology as well as literature and art. Moreover, "the method of the statistician as well as that of the critic of evidence" was "absolutely essential." Turner's intensive use of statistics was basic in his own work. "There has been too little cooperation of these sciences," Turner declared in 1904, "and the result is that great fields have been neglected. There are too many overlapping grounds left uncultivated owning to this independence of the scientists, too many problems that have been studied with inadequate apparatus and without due regard to their complexity."[2]

An example of Turner's use of several disciplines was his development of a method for correlating political and cultural behavior with the physiographic map. This technique, to which one of his early students, O. G. Libby, contributed substantially, enabled Turner to plot the votes of members of Congress on political and economic issues and to correlate these votes with the economic interests and cultural characteristics of the regions they represented. Thus votes for internal improvements were seen to be heaviest in areas producing surpluses; votes for tariffs on raw wool followed the migration of woolgrowing westward; and votes for government control of railroads and monopolies were most numerous in areas suffering from the unfair practice of these business enterprises. By superimposing geological maps on maps indicating the place of origin of the settlers, Turner demonstrated that in general migrants sought a terrain similar to the one with which they were familiar in their old homes. Turner also made some striking correlations between literacy and good soil and between illiteracy and poor soil. This methodology, based on statistics, geological maps, and the plotting on maps of political votes, contributed materially to a rea-

listic understanding of the relationships between physical geography and the colonizations of people, between all these factors and political and cultural phenomena and economic behavior. It is needless to say, perhaps, that Turner's methodology has been widely used in American historical scholarship.

This, then, was Turner —a pioneer in developing new methods which crossed the barriers of established disciplines and issued in a greater understanding of obscure interrelationships of many kinds; the pioneer who did much to develop the social and economic interpretations of American history; the craftsman who without ceasing to be an artist, brought historical studies into the sphere of the social sciences; the inspiring and gifted teacher who trained a great number of distinguished students; the originator of seminal interpretations of the national history; the imaginative yet disciplined scholar who, able to glimpse large vistas and yet to work with an almost infinitesimal sense of detail, gave North Americans their first dynamic synthesis of United States history.

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